# THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

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December 1980

"Camouflage, Art & Gestalt"
by Roy R. Behrens

"A Gift of Mirrors"
by William F. Fry, Jr.

Fiction:

Maria Thomas
Stephen Dixon
Ward Just

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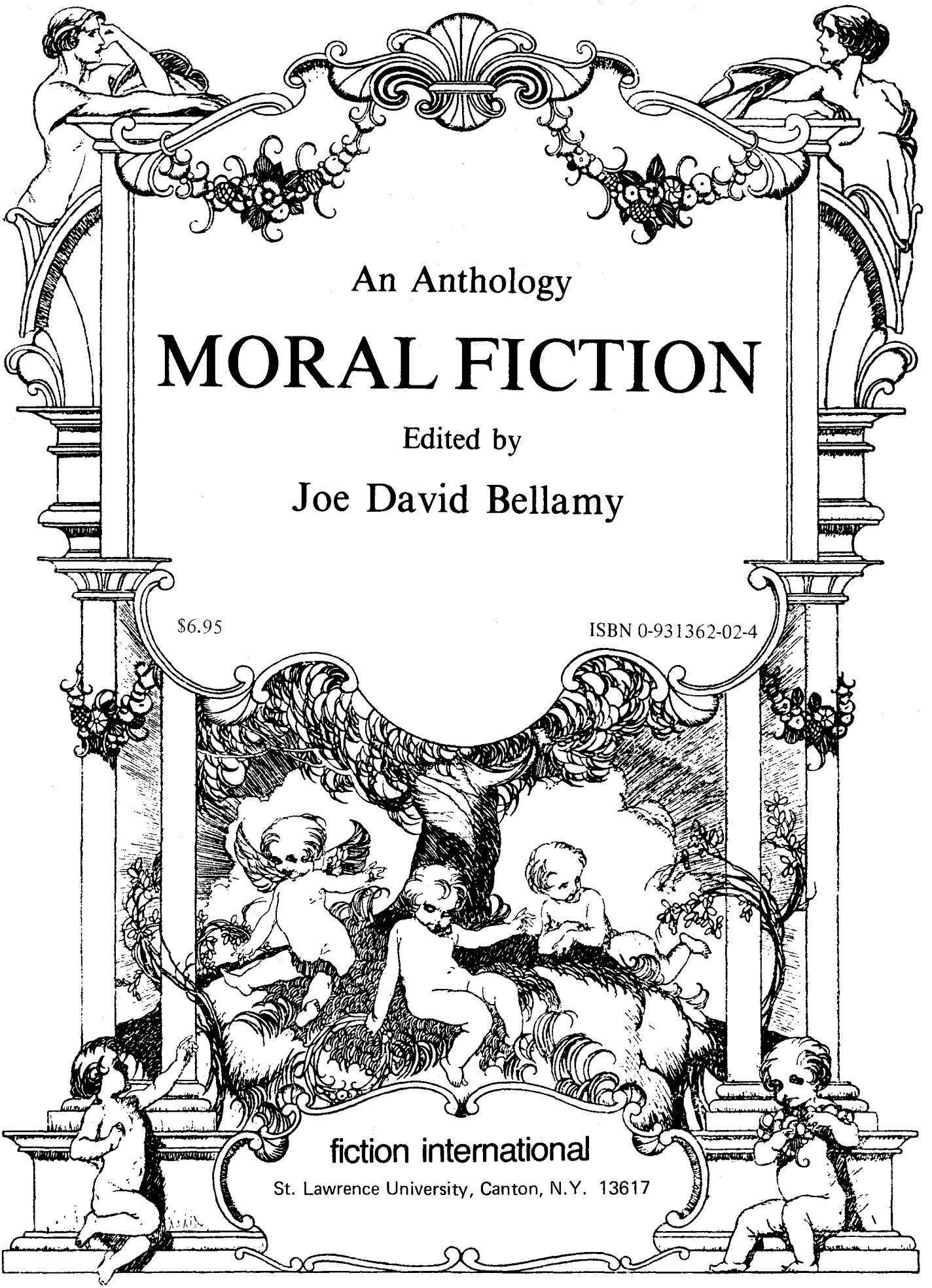

An Anthology

# MORAL FICTION

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Joe David Bellamy

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★ THE NORTH AMERICAN ★

# REVIEW

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# The Debate

## A Last Look Back

On Saturday, October 25th, three days before the Presidential Debate in Cleveland, it was announced in the gossip column of the *Plain Dealer* that Vincent Dowling, Chairman of the Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival, was available, if needed, to soothe Mr. Reagan's troubled brow by reciting the poetry of the Governor's favorite versifier, Robert Service, the Canadian author of such timeless literature as "The Spell of the Yukon."

"I am ready," Dowling was reported saying. "On a moment's notice, I can be there."

That night, at the Cleveland Comedy Club, Ollie Joe Prater, a self-titled "irregular" on the "Sanford" show, was opening Michelob bottles with his eye socket and telling Reagan jokes: "Beware of a 70 year old man who wants to die for his country."

Eight blocks away, at the New Era Burlesk, a 250-seat strip joint (Cover: $10) on Prospect Avenue, Cleveland's "Combat Zone," Storm Warning and "ten other exotics" were offering The Debate Special, a display that, reportedly, involved bunting and patriotic belly-rolls.

At Carter Headquarters, The Bond Court Hotel on St. Clair, only fifty steps from debate-ground zero in the Music Hall, a king-size bed with a color coordinated spread and sheets was moved into the President's suite. Downstairs, Chef Buttiker was telling reporters from NewsCenter 8, Action 3 News and a special team from the News Hawk Chopper that he wasn't nervous. No, sir, he'd been around too long. Made dinner for Rocky Colavito. The only concession to the importance of the forthcoming event? A special shipment of chocolate-covered strawberries, a Carter camp favorite.

Elsewhere, Shelly Davis had whipped up a Great Debate Cake to serve 100; CORK (Committee Opposed to Rearranging Kids—wonderful image, no?), an anti-busing action group, staged a rally; unemployed construction workers tied up Monday morning traffic with a 100 vehicle caravan, their backhoes and Case machines decorated with flags and signs saying "We dig America"; at a room outside Public Hall itself, now a cavernous press facility filled with closed-circuit TV monitors, typewriters and League of Women Voters slogans, a *Free Press* reporter was arranging for credentials, around his neck a chain heavy with ID's and debate memorabilia, his steno notebook open and margin to margin with pith ("What 4 lunch?")

Cleveland, Ohio's Forest City (often dubbed "The Mistake on the Lake"), a place whose Cuyahoga River was once so foul it caught fire, was ready. City maintenance crews had been working non-stop, sprucing up the route from Hopkins Airport to downtown. Streets were swept, winos uprooted, banners hung. Debate tickets, which according to rumor were being scalped in boardrooms throughout the city for $500, were distributed. Police leaves were cancelled, extra fire protection arranged. A gathering of engineers was moved out of the Convention Center to Playhouse Square. Sawhorse barricades were built.

Yes, the 2 million-plus area citizens were told, something big was coming, something bigger than the World Series of Rock (an event at the stadium that draws upward of 100 thousand), bigger even than the National Republican Convention held here in 1938. The media were coming, and the watchwords for three days would be *glamour* and *power*, virtual synonyms in this new age of talking-head celebrity.

* * *

Mr. McCluhan was wrong. The medium isn't the message; movement is. On Monday, radio stations warned of a monumental downtown traffic jam. The President was arriving, but because of the enormous security surrounding routes and times, no one could say when or where the jam, surely about to reach an epic dimension, would occur. Movement, even secret, was news. And when Carter walked or rode or jogged (as he did at 5:15 the morning of the debate), so walk, ride, and jog did a horde of newsmen—filming, taping, scribbling in a feeding frenzy.

The example:

Early on Debate Tuesday, I learn that Carter is to have an afternoon dress rehearsal, so by 3:30 I am standing on a riser outside the stage entrance to Music Hall with a dozen technicians, a handful of cameramen and ABC newsman Sam Donaldson. For a half hour we wait—virtually every other photographer and newsman are standing outside the entrance to the Bond Court—the wind icy, the sky dark, Mr. Donaldson in only a pin-striped suit, no hat. At one point, we are frisked, our tote bags searched. An instant later, the two-way radio carried by the sound engineer next to me crackles with the information that Carter is on his way over. Immediately, a camera lights up and a bank of stage lights, temporarily hanging over the street, flash on.

Across the street people are running, waving, hollering. Then, flanked by two ranks of Secret Service and uniformed police, comes Carter and the Mrs., journalists in a pack at their heels. Smaller than I expected, he seems tired, his face an expression of grim determination. The famous eyes are without the life-affirming twinkle we've come to expect, and he moves with, well, deliberation, as if this evening will be a dark and dire affair, not an event second only to the World Series in Neilsen numbers.

In the twenty or so seconds this walk takes, I feel unaccountably close to Mr. Carter—sorry for him, aggrieved for him, weak for him. All the clichés and received wisdom about the office appear true: he does seem isolated, imprisoned, alone; and it occurs to me that, even if he dared, he couldn't break ranks and, peeling off his suit coat, dash up East Sixth Street, springing over the barricades and high-tailing it past City Hall straight into the welcoming and tender arms of, say, Storm Warning and her tireless, non-partisan exotics.

---

*LEE K. ABBOTT, JR., is ordinarily a fiction writer, not a political journalist—though we imagined small difference in the present instance.*



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Quickly, he is past me, past Donaldson (who is, of course, asking about the hostages) and into the Music Hall. Abandoned, the throng of reporters mills noisily, angry that their shots were wrong, that videotape was wasted, that it was a chickenshit operation from the word *go*. It is then, in a moment as true as any during the campaign, that Donaldson, shivering, tape rolling, his eyebrows raised in mock alarm, turns to the grumbling mob of newsfolks and shouts: "Back, I tell you! Keep those animals back!"

* * *

Serious journalists, I learned, prefer the word *correspondent*. A *reporter* chases fire trucks, interviews mugged housefraus, drinks Rolling Rock. But a correspondent reflects, ruminates, analyzes, cerebrates. A reporter *files;* a correspondent, ah, *writes*.

Case in point: around 11:00 Tuesday morning, the gentleman at the typewriter in front of me in the press room is trying to fend off a local TV newshound. The fellow typing, a natty sort in herringbone jacket and rep tie, is Marino Medici, from Italy's *El Tempo*, trying to beat a six hour time difference so his story will make the morning edition in Rome. After politely refusing to be interviewed for this evening's six o'clock broadcast, he consents; and the newshound, a Y.A. Tittle look-alike, and his stogie-smoking cameraman ("Get some shots of Marino typing!") settle in for the Q and A. For five minutes, the pressroom around them a den of inactivity, I listen: "This is the moment of truth . . . Americans vote for the man rather than the issue. . . . Europeans adore Reagan because he was an actor. . . . We in Europe feel we have a right to vote in your elections because. . . ."

As clumsily as it began, it ends, Our Man in Cleveland telling the harried, time-pressed Medici to look busy, loosen his tie, unbutton his collar. "We need the footage," the fellow says. "Say, is that an Italian typewriter?"

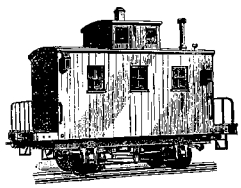
* * *

At lunch, an incredible spread of dishes from Cleveland's ethnic communities, I sit with writers from *Time, The New York Daily News*, and the *Washington Post*. The talk, fueled by several trips to the open and free bar in the rotunda of City Hall, concerns jogging, where Mrs. Jimmy wants to vacation after the election (Virgin Islands), whether the President would run in '84 if defeated in November, who's paying for the meal (all donated), the 6:30 baggage call for the press in the morning. After two platefuls of Italy's, Poland's, and Rumania's best in calories, the *Daily News* gent grouses that he's got to do, by mid-morning tomorrow, a profile of Carter in 600 words, the first three of which are *uggh, yeecch*, and *sigh*.

Outside, less worried and less full, stands a woman in ski cap and mirror glasses, wearing a sandwich board which reads, honest, EAT AT JOE'S.

PA: YOUR ATTENTION, PLEASE! CHANNEL VDS-2, FRANKFURT, WEST GERMANY, YOU HAVE A, UH, LONG DISTANCE PHONE CALL AT THE—where?—AT THE INFORMATION DESK!

By mid-afternoon, many of the celebrities begin to appear in the press room. Dan Rather (wearing suspenders), Frank Reynolds (attended by a host of go-fors), John Chancellor (pressing the flesh like a seasoned politico), Leslie Stahl (wearing a babushka)—they all come and go, not talking, I suspect, of



Michelangelo. At one point, I notice Barbara Walters winding her way in my direction from the ABC news booth. She's attractive, of course, groomed like a thoroughbred, and, for this day, blonde. When she reaches the end of my table, she stops, studying what I now like to think is the rough draft of the questions she will ask later that night. She smells great—expensive, complex, clean. Especially noteworthy is that her dress is—forgive me—low-cut; and she is, as Lenny Bruce (himself a thoroughbred) used to say in another context, "fully exposed." For the record: she's heavily, dot, dot, dot wantonly, freckled.

PA: ATTENTION, PLEASE. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, COULD I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION? (Pause.) NEVER MIND.

At six that evening I meet a woman who's doing freelance radio work for WBBG-AM. She's tired, o'er-wrought with worry, cranky. She's contracted with a British daily outside London for six features, one of which, she thought four hours ago, might be about the Great Debate. All she's got now is a handful of Secret Service code names for the Prez (Red Fox, Blue Bird, Night Train), a dieter's illicit urge to pig out, a nabob's natter, and a worthless sociology BS from Bryn Mawr. In an hour, we've written the following lead: "It was a cold and blustery night in Cleveland when Candidates Reagan and Carter took the high ground in Music Hall in front of 700 guests and 1500 bored, bored, bored reporters. . . ."

When the debate itself begins, a strange thing happens: those electronic media folks who, only minutes ago, seemed so important and celebrated, are now decidedly unimportant; the truly important people are the writers—so important, in fact, that those with the costly and compact hardware spend the ninety minutes taping and photographing, not the candidates, but writers writing.

* * *

After the debate, I am turned away from the Carter party in the Ritz Room of the Bond Court; so, instead, I go to a bar where, because of my pass and press ID, I receive a free drink, not the newly invented Sloe Jim Fizz or the Ron Rico Reagan. I have no insights, I realize, not a thing original to add to the welter of words and images wrought by this campaign. I have only the fantasy that Ollie Joe Prater, now well-liquored, his grit's eyes alive with fury, has burst into Music Hall, followed by dozens of cake-gorged construction workers, each of whom is wrapped in a color-coordinated bedspread and each of whom resembles the next century's incarnation of grue, wist, and human longing.

The next day I call Vincent Dowling. He is upset but realistic. No, he hadn't been allowed to recite the special but not secret Service verse to candidate Reagan in the "handling" room just off-stage. He'd gone to Public Hall, all right, but without a ticket and no clearance, he was merely another bozo.

I ask for a sample of what he'd intended to do and for ten minutes, Mr. Dowling, as dramatic as Hamlet, barks a tuneful rendition of "Rhymes of a Red Cross Man," whose themes, like those of the campaign and debate themselves, are hardship, heartbreak and lasting woe. —*Lee K. Abbott, Jr.*



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# 1980

You'd think Dostoyevsky wrote 1980
for ABC.
Night games go on
under atomic lighting.
Folks in rubber gloves
split and recombine
life.
At home, objectively,
people thumbing picturebooks
to find out who they want to be.
Women marching off to work
bugles playing in their heads.
At last! say the kids.
Aha! says the tax-man.
Holy Christ, says the husband,
two new incomes
equal one old one
and I make my own breakfast.
Colleges, not to be left out, inflate grades.
Arabs inflate everything.
Having sat on sand a thousand years
puffing and dreaming
the dream all at once comes true,
for no other reason than History
imitating Farce:
they sat; western civilization ran
sweated, accumulated, feared God
and invented a technology
that runs on oil.
In a blink of Allah's eye the Arabs
have all the spare money in the world.
They use it according to their ancient lights:
Feuds. Holy War. Intricacies
of terror. Meanwhile sheriffs quit
in small midwestern towns
where parents won't allow the arrest
of their vandal children. Cable television
curves X-rated movies
around church spires underneath which
fundamentalists urge their filth. In France,
where vanity makes do for pride,
a stream of anti-Semitism escapes.

World highways
serve as lunch counters for crows;
the seas
a nuclear-missile garage.
The President of Yale

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says we're not crazy, just tired.
(Only the Japanese, it seems,
aren't tired.) A corporate secretary
pulls down her pants
sits on a Xerox
and photocopies the ultimate
bottom line.
On the wall of the Men's Room
in the psychology building
a student writes, "My mother
made me a homosexual."
Another student has written underneath,
"If I give her the wool,
will she make me one too?"
Non-fiction is stranger than truth
these days, and to preside over it
the honeyed hypocrisy of one man,
the molasses mind of another.
The voting privilege
reduced to zero.
Zero is the end sum
of the packaged personality.

We are out of nature now,
the next posture beyond the upright
is The Second Coming. Meanwhile
suspended between high science
and low technology, one stares in fascination
at Old Tales. A dog, a kind of collie,
belonging not to the man but to his fiancée,
saw the man fall off an 85-foot cliff
into a stream (face down, unconscious).
The dog jumps off the cliff,
breaking both back legs in the landing,
crawls out into the stream,
nuzzles the man
like a massive peanut (couldn't tug)
safely onto the bank.
Ralston Purina gave him (the dog)
a thousand-dollar bond. I don't know
if it's a young dog, but in six years
at current rates of inflation,
that bond will be worth $500;
if he's planning to leave it to a humane association
for old folks, better to do it now and take
the full deduction. Or get himself on
"That's Incredible" (after having published
his book entitled *How to Get Rich
through Lifesaving).*

Look how the desert spreads,
Mr. Yeats. The statistical beast,
the humped Percentage
overgrazes. The world's surface
thins. On it play
contortions of conviction,
infant voices yelling Do or Die.
Then the deep aftersleep
of television.
Too clear for prophecy,
too much of a piece
to be substance.
Only our shadow is so precise.

—KENNETH LASH



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*In 1917 Lieutenant Norman Wilkinson, a British painter and camoufleur of ships, was loaned to the U.S. Navy. By October of the following year, camouflage patterns had been applied to 1,127 American ships, less than one percent of which were sunk by German torpedoes. In this photograph, dated 12 July 1918, U.S. Navy camoufleurs are applying "dazzle" patterns to experimental ship models. U.S. Navy Department photograph, National Archives and Record Service.*

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ROY R. BEHRENS, the NAR's design editor, teaches at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. This is the first chapter of his book on *Art and Camouflage: Concealment and Deception in Nature, Art, and War,* which will be published by the NAR in January.

# Camouflage, Art and Gestalt

The word "camouflage" comes from the French verb *camoufler,* meaning to mask or disguise. Most probably, *camoufler* came from *camouflet,* the noun for a manner of snubbing—blowing smoke in someone's nose and by that obscuring his features. It might be traced to *chault mouflet,* an earlier term for "hot face."

Deception during warfare is as hoary as war itself. As early as 500 B.C., a Chinese army tactician, Sun Tzu, observed that "All warfare is based on deception," so that he wisely advised:

> When able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must seem inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe that we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near. Hold out the bait; entice the enemy. Feign disorder and crush him.

Nevertheless, it was not until World War I that the first *service de camouflage* was implemented by France. One who practiced camouflage—including concealment by smoke—was called a *camoufleur.*

When camouflage spread to England, so did the use of the word. On May 25, 1917, the *Daily Mail* reported that "The act of hiding anything from your enemy is termed 'camouflage'." Two months later the same newspaper announced that the King of England had "paid a visit to what is called a camouflage factory," where he was introduced to "all the latest Protean tricks for concealing or, as we all say now, 'camouflaging' guns, snipers, observers."

Two years later, "camouflage" had amassed so many figurative, non-military connotations that *The Athenaeum* observed that the word "has met with more wear and tear in a few months than many receive in a century." During this period, one finds reference to a "camouflaged autocracy," to eggs "camouflaged" in a scramble, and even to a telephone as "camouflaged" by its design.

*He was thought to be dead at birth in Málaga on October 25, 1881. Then his uncle Salvador Ruiz, a celebrated Spanish physician who had delivered the boy, calmly puffed cigar smoke up the baby's nose, provoking howls of protest. Thus did Picasso embark on 91 years of rugged life.*

Time *magazine, May 26, 1980, p. 79.*

*Another thing that interested us enormously was how different the camouflage of the french looked from the camouflage of the germans, and then once we came across some very very neat camouflage and it was american. The idea was the same but as after all it was different nationalities who did it the difference was inevitable. The colour schemes were different, the designs were different, the way of placing them was different, it made plain the whole theory of art and its inevitability.*

*Gertrude Stein,* The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas. *NYC: Vintage Books, 1961, p. 187.*



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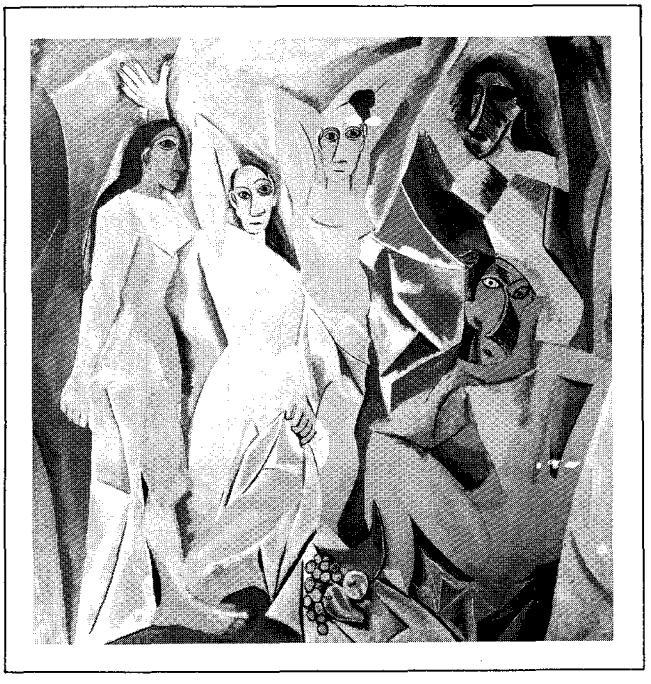
*That summer they went again to Spain and he came back with some spanish landscapes and one may say that these landscapes . . . were the beginning of cubism . . . In these pictures he first emphasized the way of building in spanish villages, the line of the houses not following the landscape but cutting across and into the landscape, becoming undistinguishable in the landscape by cutting across the landscape. It was the principle of the camouflage of the guns and the ships in the war.*

*Gertrude Stein (referring to Picasso)*, The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas. *NYC: Vintage Books, 1961, pp. 89-90.*



*Pablo Picasso.* Les Demoiselles d'Avignon *(1907). Oil on canvas, 8' × 7'8". Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest.*

Military camouflage was officially conceived in 1915 at the urging of French artists, among them Jean-Louis Forain, a friend of Monet and Degas. It may be proof of a *Zeitgeist*—a spirit of the times or a ripeness—that the advent of military camouflage coincides so closely with the births and popularity of three other major ideas:

First, a principal breakthrough in the study of natural camouflage occurred in 1896 when Abbott H. Thayer, a prominent American painter, published a paper on "The Law Which Underlies Protective Coloration." This was followed in 1902 by Thayer's essay on "The Meaning of the White Under Sides of Animals," and, in 1909, his influential and controversial book on *Concealing Coloration in the Animal Kingdom, An Exposition of the Laws of Disguise Through Colour and Pattern.*

Second, in 1907 in France, Pablo Picasso completed *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, the harbinger of Cubism, "the most astounding transformation in the history of art." As Picasso and others later observed, World War I camouflage resembles Cubist painting, since both disrupt expected shapes by what was then called "dazzle."

Finally, in the fall of 1909, three young German psychologists began to work together at the Institute of Psychology at Frankfurt-am-Main in studies of visual perception. The psychologists were Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffka, and Wolfgang Köhler, and the theory of vision they espoused is commonly known as *Gestalt.* The Gestalt principles of perceptual organization—which are roughly equivalent to Thayer's "laws of disguise"—are now used to account for the effectiveness of military camouflage, protective coloration in nature, and the dissolution of contours that earmarks Cubist art.

One might argue convincingly that none of these concepts was new. Concealment and deception are part of the conduct of war. The disquieting spaces of Cubism can also be found in Cézanne. The survival function of animal coloration was noted by Wallace and Bates. Similarly, while Gestalt psychology did not ripen until 1910-1920, its heritage can be traced to at least 1890—when Wertheimer was only ten years old, and Koffka and Köhler were three.

In 1890 a psychologist named Christian von Ehrenfels published an essay entitled *"Über Gestaltqualitäten"* (On Gestalt Qualities), in which he used the term *gestalt* in the sense that we think of it now.

Ehrenfels has been described as having "musical and poetic talents. The composer Anton Bruckner tutored him in counterpoint. He was a passionate Wagnerian and even wrote texts for operas himself. He was a friend of Freud and wrote articles on sexual morals in which he advocated legalized polygamy."

In vogue at the time of Ehrenfels' paper was a psychology of atomism, the proponents of which restricted themselves to interpreting things "from below"—analyzing the functions of parts, and from that discerning the whole. Within this approach, the nature of parts was absolute, and wholes were the sum of their features.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Contrarily, Gestalt psychology was contextual or holistic, interpreting things "from above." As Paul Weiss once explained, atomism is like looking through the customary end of a telescope, and by that enlarging the details, while the holist peers through the opposite end and sees the *relations* of things. To the Gestaltist, components are altered by where they are and by what surrounds them, such that wholes are best described as "more than the sum of their parts."

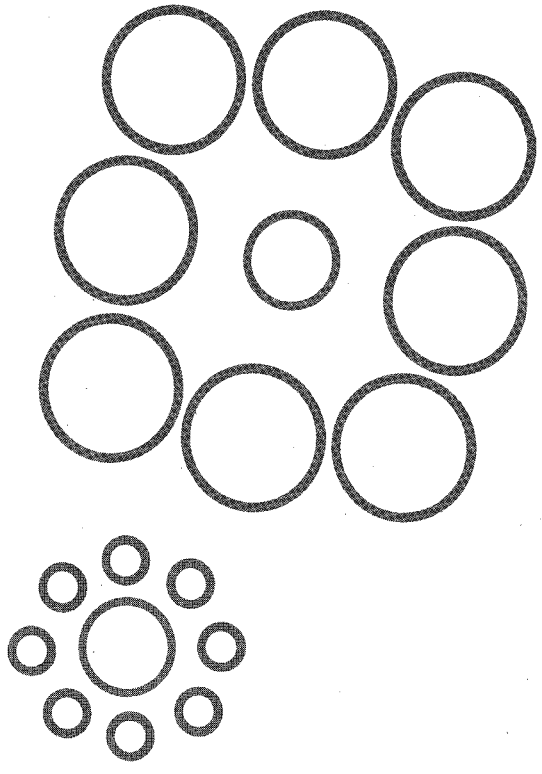
These are common notions now, but they were daring ideas when Ehrenfels offered the simple example of a twelve-note melody played in two different keys. In either key, one cannot determine the melody by studying quarantined parts, just as the letters p, t, s and o, examined individually, do not foretell the "whole effect" of *pots* or *tops* or *stop* or *post* or *spot,* or whatever form one *opts* for. Further, while the version played in one key may not contain any of the notes from the other, the melody is recognizable in both. Accordingly, the nature of things is not in their parts but rather in how we arrange them. The *gestalt* is the phantom thirteenth feature—the structural aspect or set of relations that survives a change of the parts.

Ehrenfels' modest paper was a theory of how we see patterns, and there are precursors to some of his thoughts in earlier writings on art. In color theory for example, one thinks of the contextualist notion of *simultaneous contrast,* a term introduced in 1839 with the publication of a book by Michel Chevreul, a French chemist, and now a cardinal concept in theories of art and design.

In this study by Chevreul, simultaneous contrast is distinguished from *successive contrast,* a temporal illusion in which one can perceive a green "after-image" immediately after gazing at a spot of its complement, red. Simultaneous contrast, as the name implies, is non-temporal or instantaneous: simply, when two colors are juxtaposed, their differences seem to be heightened. Accordingly, a red shape on a green background will appear to be more vivid than if it were on an orange background; while a grey shape on a red background will seem to be slightly green.

The pedagogical emphasis on the simultaneous contrast of color is due to Josef Albers, the Bauhaus artist and teacher, whose *Homage to the Square* paintings accentuate the "interaction of color" (as he entitled his book) through the use of enfeebled squares—by shoving the squares off-center, he varies the strengths of their borders and quietly mutates the hues: thus one color appears to be two, or two colors seem to be one.

Without the use of color, one can observe the simultaneous contrast of value, so that the same grey appears to be lighter when placed on black and darker when placed on white. In the simultaneous contrast of size, two circles of equal size appear to be larger or smaller in contrast to those that surround them. In these examples, as in Ehrenfels' essay, parts are altered by context and defined, in a sense, by the whole.



*In this demonstration of the simultaneous contrast of shape, the central circles in the two diagrams appear to be different sizes, even though, by measurement, they are exactly the same size. As Chevreul discovered in 1839, comparable modifications occur when a color is displaced from one background to another.*



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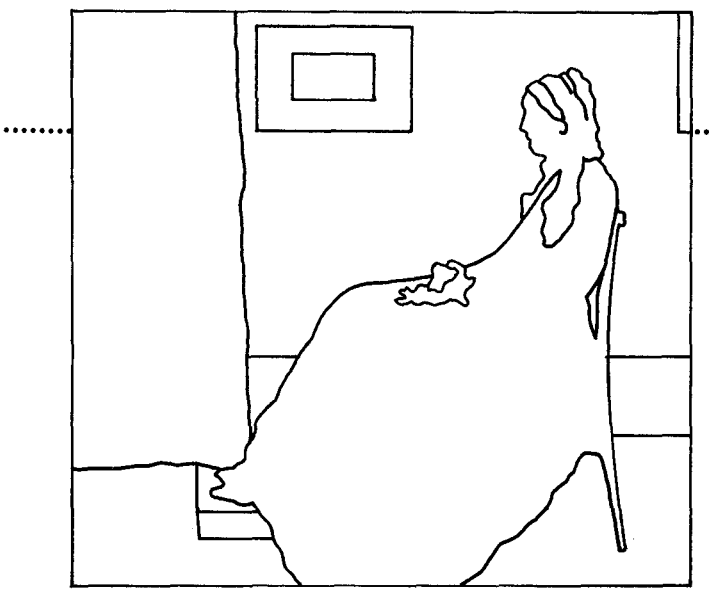
*I'll show you how to look at a picture, Cokey. Don't look at it. Feel it with your eye . . . And first you feel the shapes in the flat—the patterns, like a carpet . . . And then you feel it in the round . . . Not as if it were a picture of anyone. But a coloured and raised map. You feel all the rounds, the smooths, the sharp edges, the flats and the hollows, the lights and shades, the cools and warms. The colours and textures. There's hundreds of little differences all fitting in together . . .*

*Joyce Cary,* The Horse's Mouth. *NYC: Time Incorporated, 1965, p. 145.*



*In Whistler's* Arrangement in Grey and Black #1: The Artist's Mother *(1872), on which this diagram is based, there is a deliberate use of closure—a horizontal structural line is implied by the bottom edges of the two picture frames and the tip of the subject's nose. Spatial correlations of this kind are common devices in painting and graphic design.*

It might also be significant that the year of Ehrenfels' paper coincides with the advent of *formalism* in art criticism. In an essay in 1890, the French painter Maurice Denis stated that "a painting—before being a war horse, a female nude, or whatever story—is essentially a flat surface covered with colors arranged in a certain order." Denis' message is two-fold: (a) that paintings have pictures and patterns, and (b) that patterns are prior.

Denis' essay is predated by the protestations of James McNeill Whistler, who complained in 1878 that "the vast majority of English folk cannot and will not consider a picture as a picture [i.e., pattern], apart from any story which it may be supposed to tell."

Six years earlier, Whistler had exhibited a painting of his mother. He entitled it *Arrangement in Grey and Black #1: The Artist's Mother,* but the public recalled it—and still does—as simply "Whistler's Mother." The artist responded with fury, since all his diligent patterning had been upstaged by the subject.

"Art should be independent of all clap-trap," Whistler raged, and "as music is the poetry of sound, so is painting the poetry of sight, and the subject-matter has nothing to do with the harmony of sounds or colors." To follow, he entitled his paintings "nocturnes," and in 1874 he exhibited a painting so devoid of a picture that he was accused by the critic John Ruskin of "flinging a pot of paint in the public's face."

It was in part the remonstrations of Whistler and the reiteration of Denis that enabled painters of the twentieth century to abandon the representation of "things" and only portray patterns, as did the Bauhaus painters—Albers, Kandinsky, and Klee.

Aside from purely formal concerns, Ehrenfels' basic conception—that the character, appearance or function of a thing is subject to transformation when it is extracted from one environment and displaced to another, that one cannot define a thing without denoting its context—seems as much reflected in the Dada and Surrealist mode of *radical juxtaposition*, in which the chance conjoining of things provokes a change in their meanings. This is what Lautréamont described when he referred to beauty as "the fortuitous encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table." It is the *raison d'être* of collage and assemblage, happenings and Pop Art, and for Duchamp's shocking schemes of "found objects" and "ready-mades," in which one need not make a thing, but simply find and place it.

Ehrenfels lived until 1932 and apparently grew eccentric enough to identify God with gestalt. Except as a distant hero, he seems to have played no role in the research of MaxWertheimer, who was offered space and a tachistoscope at the Institute of Psychology in the fall of 1910.



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Wertheimer's suitcase contained a toy stroboscope. With Koffka and Köhler as subjects, he began to experiment with *apparent movement*, the illusion that successively flashing lights appear to be one that is moving. This common phenomenon is the basis for motion pictures—in which successively flashing pictures appear to be one that is moving—as well as the trail of blinking lights that seem to be circling the theatre sign. In this case, the illusion of movement is a "gestalt quality," a property of the pattern of lights (e.g., their arrangement and timing) not of the lights by themselves.

Wertheimer's experiments with apparent movement (published in 1912) contain all the materiel for his later writings on *unit forming factors*—the principles of perceptual organization—in which the essential question is: What features of a visual field prompt some parts to constellate, such that one perceives them as a single "thing" or unit? These principles of visibility are exact inversions of the laws of camouflage, in which one wants a thing to blend with the features of what surrounds it, or to make it break apart by way of the tactic of "dazzle."

As it happened, the publishable investigation of unit forming factors was interrupted by World War I, when Wertheimer moved to Berlin, while Koffka and Köhler went elsewhere.

Ironically, a fourth member of the group, Kurt Lewin, who later applied Gestalt theory to social psychology, was drafted into the army. He served as a captain in the German infantry, "during which he maintained sufficient composure to prepare a unique article on the figure-ground phenomena present in the camouflaged scenery of trench warfare!"

The concept of *figure-ground* refers to the perceptual requisite that any articulate field must have at least two parts: a cohesive feature called *figure* and an indistinct portion called *ground*. The initial description of this phenomenon was published in 1915 by a Danish psychologist, Edgar Rubin. He was not a Gestaltist, but the relevance of his work was recognized when translated into German in 1921, and in Koffka's *Principles of Gestalt Psychology* (1935), Rubin is frequently cited.

Rubin referred to the polarity of figure-ground as *Dingcharakter und Stoffcharakter*, in which a salient "thing" contrasts with a background of "stuff." This is prescriptive of *order*—any condition of order—whether (as in music) sound in contrast to silence, (in architecture) inside in contrast to out, slow contrasted with fast, large contrasted with small, black with white, red with green, and so on.

When figures have no *difference*, they merge with what surrounds them, and no "thing" is perceived. Indeed, as Gregory Bateson puts it, perceptual information is essentially "news of difference" and "it takes at least two somethings to create a difference." Or, as R.D. Laing would say, "The condition of the possibility of anything being at all is that it is *in relation to* that which it is not." Figure without ground (or ground without a figure) is "the sound of one hand clapping." Here, as in Ehrenfels' essay, the character of the part is determined by how it is parceled, and, at least in this strict sense, there is no *Ding an sich*.

*Be fairly ruthless, I think, with opponents of 'modern' painting. If you are lucky enough to find a man who still says: 'I don't know about pictures, but I know what I like,' point out to him that because he does not know about pictures he does not know what he likes, and repeat this in a thundering voice. If he whimpers back something about it all being too advanced for him, point out exactly how many years Cézanne died before he was born, and the precise date of the exhibition of the first Modiglianis in London. Exaggerate both these dates and say, 'After all, Matisse and your great-grandmother are exact contemporaries.' If your man says of some picture, 'Yes, but what does it mean?' ask him, and keep on asking him, what his carpet means, or the circular patterns on his rubber shoe-soles. Make him lift up his foot to look at them.*

*Stephen Potter,* The Complete Upmanship. *NYC: New American Library, 1978, p. 202.*

*A figure is perceivable to the extent that (a) it differs from its background, and (b) its components are structurally integrated* (top diagram). *"Low visibility" camouflage is a subversion of the difference between figure and ground, so that two things appear to be one (center); while "dazzle" camouflage destroys the homogeneity of the figure, so that one thing appears to be two or more* (bottom). *One may of course combine the two.*



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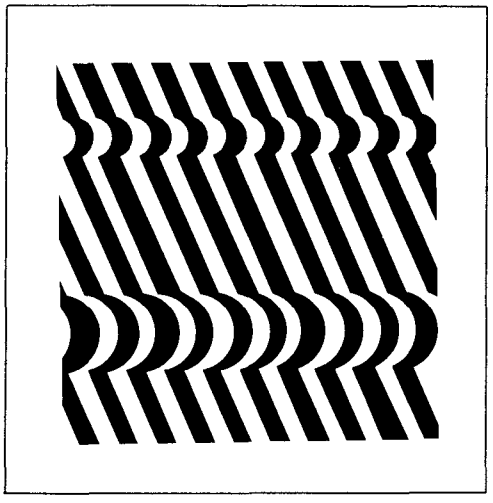
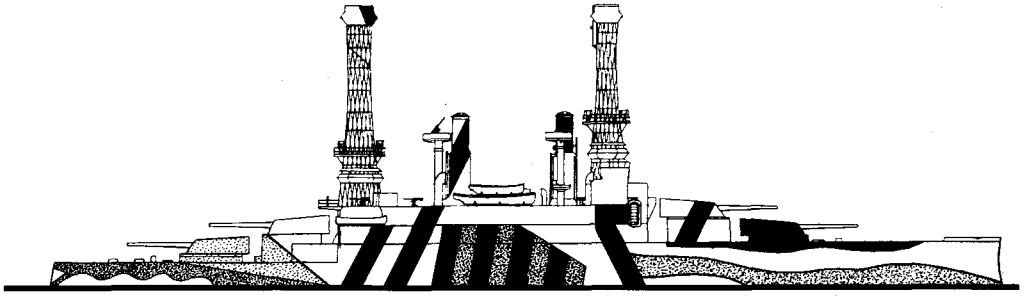


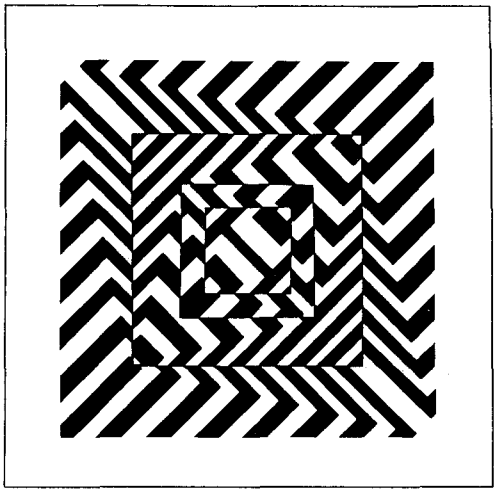
While any discernible part of a field can be perceived as a figure, one can outline general traits that distinguish figures from backgrounds. Figural shapes, for example, usually tend to be smaller than the encompassing ground; and figures must have boundaries (outlines, edges, contours) while the ground need not. The figure seems in front of the ground, while the ground extends behind; and figures appear to be solid (they seem to possess "thingness") while the ground is like a fog.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that the salience of a figure is directly dependent on two essential conditions: (a) the extent to which the figure's parts are structurally integrated, such that they form a unit, and (b) the degree to which that unit is different from the ground. Both conditions must be met. Even if the figure stands out from the ground, a disordered figure will fragment; and even a unified figure must be distinct from the background.

Aside from mimicry and misdirection, inversions of these conditions are the primary means of camouflage. Translated into the terminology of World War I camouflage, violations of figural unity became known as "dazzle," while the blending of figure and ground was referred to as "low visibility." In general, the latter was used in land warfare, while the former was used at sea.



*This drawing of a hypothetical ship, based on an actual dazzle scheme, exemplifies the bizarre appearance of WWI naval camouflage* (center). *Through the employment of dazzle, flat surfaces may appear to be three-dimensional* (top), *and the edges of shapes can be obscured* (bottom).



Art portrays a unified form and—however daringly—always distinguishes figure from ground, in order to utter some "thing," while camouflage always subverts these laws in order to say "no thing"—or at least some other thing than the moth or the ship that it hides. As the zoologist and camoufleur Hugh B. Cott has said, the artist makes "something unreal recognizable" while the camoufleur makes "something real unrecognizable." Although they share techniques, the intentions of the artist and the camoufleur are at opposing poles—the former reveals, the latter conceals—but as the Cubists' paintings show, the end results may seem the same.

Edgar Rubin is best recalled for his work with *reversible figures* (sometimes now called "counterchange"), visual fields in which both parts could equally function as figures. Familiar examples of this dual (or duel) phenomenon include his vase-and-faces and the now rather tiresome works of the artist M.C. Escher, who was directly influenced by the writings of Rubin and Koffka. In the center of Escher's *Sky and Water I* (1938), the shapes are equally "figural," and one can perceive the black as ducks or switch to the white and see fish. Since the physical stimuli in reversible figures are of equivalent power, the choice of the figure comes about through *selective attention.*



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The factor of attention is usually attributed to the assumption that the input capabilities of one's sense organs are considerably greater than the processing capabilities of the central nervous system—simply, we have the physical ability to take in much more than our minds can possibly handle. To avoid an overload, or a bottleneck at best, the system "tunes in to" significant aspects of one's surroundings, and delays or neglects the rest. In order to perceive at all, one must be partially blind. In order to attend, one must also ignore—or, as Alan Watts has said, "we think by ignoring—by attending to one term of a relationship (the figure) and neglecting the other (the ground)."

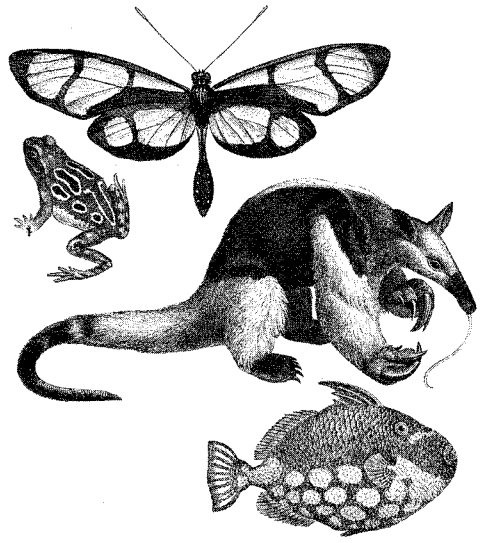
The extent of attentional blindness is demonstrated by the misdirection skills of pickpockets and sleight-of-hand magicians, who camouflage their "groundwork" by pointing to figural decoys. Conversely (as we shall examine in Chapter Five), acts of invention or creativity tend to occur when we cast off the "blinders of habit" and suddenly switch our attentions to previously ignored aspects. In the writings of Conan Doyle, this is the tactic of Sherlock Holmes, who states in one of the stories: "You know my method. It is founded upon the observation of trifles."

The counterchange of figure and ground is equally central to Kierkegaard's "The Rotation Method," in which he rotates his perceptual field as farmers rotate crops—by changing the "crop and mode of cultivation" rather than changing the land. Writes Kierkegaard:

> There was a man whose chatter certain circumstances made it necessary for me to listen to. At every opportunity he was ready with a little philosophical lecture, a very tiresome harangue. Almost in despair, I suddenly discovered that he perspired copiously when talking. I saw the pearls of sweat gather on his brow, unite to form a stream, glide down his nose, and hang at the extreme point of his nose in a drop-shaped body. From the moment of making this discovery, all was changed. I even took pleasure in inciting him to begin his philosophical instruction, merely to observe the perspiration on his brow and at the end of his nose.

Gestalt psychology virtually lapsed, because of an insistence on nativism and isomorphism, but the bulk of its theories and findings are widely accepted today, including its focus on contexts and, of course, figure and ground. Perhaps its most durable contributions were Wertheimer's unit forming factors—or principles of perceptual organization—most of which can now be seen as variations on the *principle of similarity*, the theory that features which look alike will tend to be seen as a group.

In the words of the art theorist Rudolf Arnheim (a student of Wertheimer and Koffka), "The relative degree of similarity in a given perceptual pattern makes for a corresponding degree of connection or fusion." This perception of resemblance can derive from as many comparisons as there are perceptible traits, including such obvious adhesives as color, shape, value, texture, size, direction, location, and speed. Special cases of similarity grouping include "the law of proximity" (similarity of location or nearness) and "the law of contiguity" (similarity of occurrence in time). The latter is basic to cause-and-effect (in which occurrence A is repeatedly followed by B) and to conditioned behavior (for example, Pavlov's dog).



*Abbott H. Thayer, 19th century American painter and the "father of camouflage," was among the first to show that the contrasting patterns on natural forms were analogous to military dazzle camouflage schemes.*

*By viewing the background as figure in this 19th century print, one can perceive a human skull in which the heads of the children become the eyes, and the dog's head is the nose of the skull. Paradoxical or reversible figures of this sort are commonly found in the work of M.C. Escher, an interdisciplinary account of which can be read in D.R. Hofstadter's* Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid *(NYC: Basic Books, 1979).*



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*. . . repetition is what holds life together, giving it abidingness, beingness, or endurance. A painting in which no line, no shape, no color, no size, no direction, no movement, was in any way ever repeated would be complete disorder . . . But this manner of unification has obvious limitations, even if fundamental to any and all ways of unifying elements. If persisted in, it easily degenerates into monotony and boredom, even hypnotic trance, which no longer permits controlled presentation of feeling, but opens instead the flood-gates of the irrational, which is neither recognizable life nor art.*

*Arthur B. Fallico,* Art and Existentialism. *Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962, p. 48.*

*The pictorial content of the paintings of Francis Bacon is disturbing and repellent, "leaving a trail of the human presence and memory trace of past events," as he once described his work, "as the snail leaves its slime." Viewed as aesthetic constructions, they are exquisite examples of variegated unity, of harmony and discordance. In* Self-Portrait *(1970), on which this diagram is based, there is a rhythmic recurrence of oval shapes (indicated by arrows).*

The operation of unit forming factors accounts for the allocation of stars into constellations, the perception of numbers in a test for color blindness, the uniform similarities and differences between two football teams, and the orchestration of intricate shapes within a work of art. Without this fusion of features, the parts could not cohere to form an integral unit; and without the segregation of disparates, there could be no contrast and no thing would appear. "The reason that iron filings placed in a magnetic field exhibit a pattern," states Christopher Alexander, "—or have form, as we say—is that the field they are in is not homogeneous. If the world were totally regular and homogeneous, there would be no forces, and no forms. Everything would be amorphous."

In addition, there are factors beyond similarity which the Gestaltists emphasized, including the tendency to perceive *simple forms*, and especially the factor of *closure*, in which one tends to fill the gaps of shapes that are only implied. As evidenced by these factors, perception strives to clarify, and the least disturbing visual field is a boldly outlined circle (the circle is the simplest shape) against a hackneyed background.

The complexity of visual patterns derives from the fact that parts may attract on the basis of one unit forming factor (for example, similar colors) but be repelled by another (for example, dissimilar shapes). It is this optical grapple that yields the *variegated unity* on which all forms of art are based. Works of art, like daily life, eschew two conditions: One is that of boredom, the other is that of confusion. In the first, parts appear too similar, such that the whole is humdrum, monotonous and routine. In the second, parts are too dissimilar, such that the whole is a hodgepodge, and the parts do not relate.

*Variatio delectat* ("variety delights") is an age-old maxim, and the principle of unity-in-diversity has been linked to aesthetics since antiquity. Art is a delectable mixture of similarity and dissimilarity, order and disorder, repetition and variation, harmony and discordance. "Symmetry and asymmetry, closure and gap, continuity and contrast, must combine" in a work of art, as Arthur Koestler asserted, and "the surest symptom of decadent art is that it leaves nothing to the imagination; the Muse has bared her flabby bosom like a too-obliging harlot—there is no veiled promise, no mystery, nothing to divine."

Art must build a unit, but it must be a fractured unit or one that is partially hidden. This is endemic of all forms of art, not just twentieth century art, which, as Katharine Kuh observes, "has been characterized by shattered surfaces, broken color, segmented compositions, dissolving forms and shredded images."

In camouflage, concealment is the sole intent, but because of light and movement, the camoufleur always fails somewhat, and often as not his work looks like a kind of tongue-tied painting.


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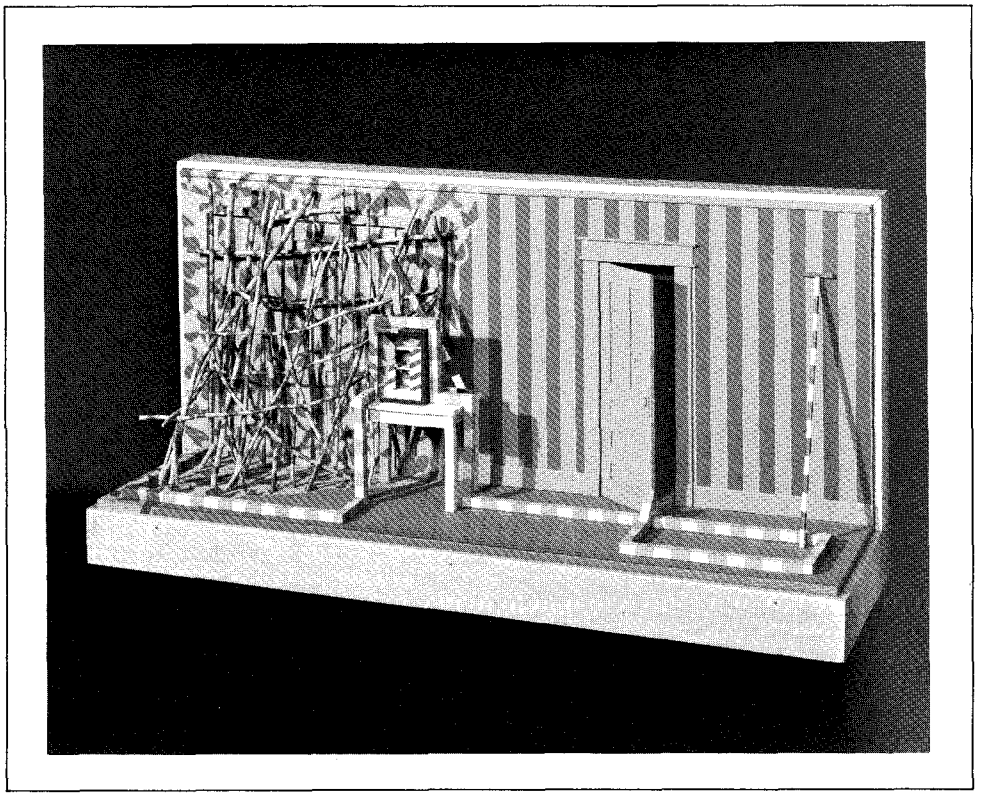
As notable a critic as Sigfried Giedion has said that Cubism violated the single vantage point of Renaissance perspective by simultaneously depicting objects from multiple points of view. Thus, continues Giedion, "to the three dimensions of the Renaissance which have held good as constituent facts throughout so many centuries there is added a fourth one—time. . . The presentation of objects from several points of view introduces a principle which is intimately bound up with modern life—simultaneity."

In concert with Giedion's statement, innumerable books and essays have offered accounts of the kinship between Cubist painting and the concept of simultaneity in twentieth century physics. Einstein firmly denied the link, and John A. Richardson seems to have shown that simultaneity has little to do with either the Cubists or Einstein. It is more likely, as some would contend, that "the great cubist achievement was *camouflage.*"

*I think it likely that there are no finer galleries of abstract art than the cabinet drawers of the tropical butterfly collector . . . It is often, I believe, the fascination of this abstract colour and design, as much as an interest in biology or a love of nature, that allures the ardent lepidopterist, although all these may be combined; he has his favourite genera and dotes upon his different species of* Vanessa *and* Parnassius, *as the modernist does upon his examples of Matisse or Ben Nicholson.*

*Sir Alister Hardy,* The Living Stream. *NYC: Harper and Row, 1965, p. 151.*



Like World War I camouflage, Cubism shattered the boundaries of things in at least three ways: (1) it violated the integrity of the two-dimensional figure by way of the tactic of "dazzle"; (2) it allowed the figure (in places) to be confused with the ground ("low visibility"); and (3) it broke the rules for depicting depth in such a way that things in front can also lie behind. One is reminded of World War II fighter pilots who threw foil from airplane windows in order to baffle the radar, since the paramount cachet of Cubism was "the unordered set or series. . . an uncanny sort of space on which the viewer can never put his finger or rest his mind."

*David Bower.* There and Elsewhere *(1979). Mixed media, 7'' × 10'' × 24''. Collection, Robert Fields, Chicago. Photo courtesy Roy Boyd Gallery, Chicago. Bower's ingenious "shelf environments" are deliberate applications of both dazzle and low visibility camouflage schemes.*



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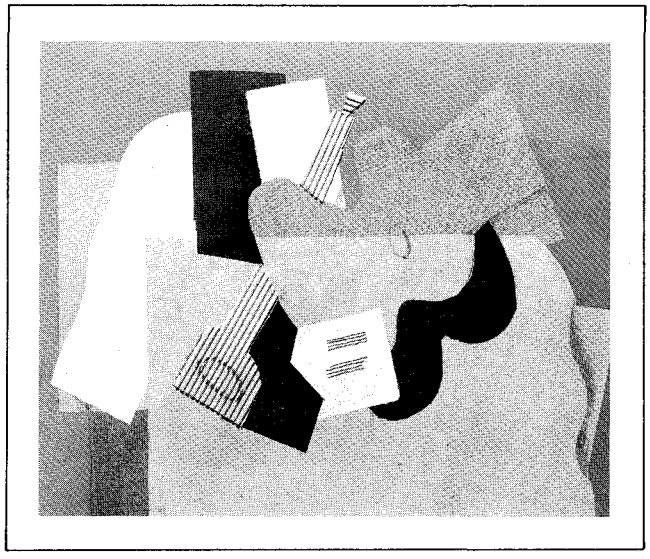
*Cubism went out of its way to deny the eye stable focusing points round which the rest of the composition could be organized. When it fastened on one feature the cubistic fragments fell into a new pattern, which was shattered again as soon as the eye wandered on and was caught by another feature. The picture kept heaving in and out as the eye tried to infuse some measure of stability into the pattern.*

*Anton Ehrenzweig,* The Hidden Order of Art. *Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971, p. 67.*



*Georges Braque.* Musical Forms *(1918). Collage on paper, 30⅓" × 37⅓". Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection. This collage is a prime example of the dazzle-like ambiguities of Cubism, e.g., the lower half of the guitar makes a "good unit" with the remainder of the guitar, while it also groups with the table shape which is and is not behind it.*

Cubism was hardly decadent since it redressed the Muse in an overcoat with earmuffs and mittens to boot. The critic Wylie Sypher has listed the layers it used:

> . . . a breaking of contours, the *passage*, so that a form merges with the space about it or with other forms; planes or tones that bleed into other planes and tones; outlines that coincide with other outlines, then suddenly reappear in new relations; surfaces that simultaneously recede and advance in relation to other surfaces; parts of objects shifted away, displaced, or changed in tone until forms disappear behind themselves.

This same list might have been labeled "camouflage techniques" even though, to repeat, obscurity in art does not aim at concealing the thing "but at making it more luminous by compelling the recipient to work it out by himself—to re-create it."

Both camouflage and Cubism operate in accord with the Gestalt principles of perceptual organization, the unit forming factors which Wertheimer discovered before the war and published after it ended.

At least one Gestaltist, Fritz Heider, realized sometime later "that Picasso's new technique consisted partly in destroying the natural units of familiar objects by opposing one unit forming factor to another. One specific part of the picture may make a good unit with a table according to one factor, but according to another factor it belongs to the wall."

As for camouflage, Heider notes, the Gestalt psychologists "were of course conscious of the fact that camouflage makes use of unit forming factors, and there was a rumor that Wertheimer or Koffka helped in improving it."

Nevertheless, one may be surprised to find that in 1918 a writer in *The Nation* referred to naval camouflage as a "kind of cubist painting on a colossal scale," while in 1915, as Picasso and Gertrude Stein were walking one evening in Paris on the Boulevard Raspail:

> A convoy of heavy guns on their way to the front passed them, and they noticed to their astonishment that the guns had been painted with zig-zag patterns to disrupt their outlines. We invented that, exclaimed Picasso, surprised to see that his discoveries in the breaking up of forms should have been pressed so rapidly into military service.

Georges Braque also contended that the army had copied his paintings. And later Picasso told Cocteau—no doubt with the tip of his tongue in his cheek—that the army would better "dazzle" its men if it dressed them in harlequin costumes. □

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WILLIAM LOGAN

# BLUE YACHT

No opening line ruptures the surface
Of silence better than any other.
Already the work has been accomplished
By the brave title. Farewell, title,

Now receding into the impoverished memory.
Interjections and farewells
Accomplish little toward sinking a well
Through the thick, impermeable rock face

Of silence toward—toward what? Not memory
Or passion. Or possession. Toward another,
Less agreeable silence, the underside of title,
The dolmen marking the limit of accomplishment,

Beyond which is *terra incognita*. Accomplishment
For its own sake is odious. The well
Or sane do it for money or title,
The nobility or wealth beneath the surface

Of feeling. One man is never as good as another.
None of us will last long in memory.
Similarly, no line lasts long. Like emery
Board, the abrasive accomplishment

Soon effaces the rightful claims of other,
Older events. More aggressive lines soon dwell
Vividly on the capricious surface
Of memory. Take our forgotten title,

Doddering into the past like Lear. Similar titles,
Other bad beginnings confuse the memory,
Until that title, that small ship at the surface,
Is as forgotten as air to the accomplished

Diver. Here the weight of lines swells
The brain as it compresses the body. Other
Lines, constantly piling up, smother
The raptured memory. What was the title?

Not even the darting fish remember it well.
What was projected as a silly exercise in memory
Is now a *fait accompli*.
We have ended what began at the surface.



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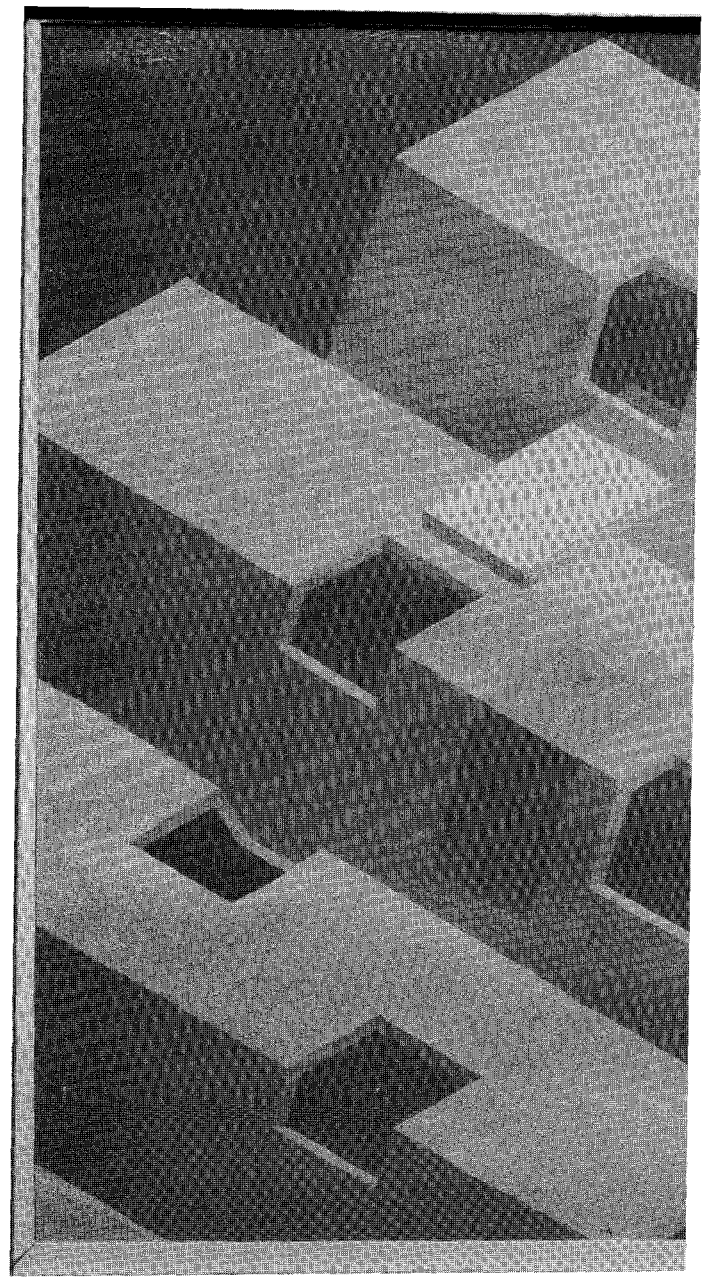
# A GUIDE TO THE GEOGRAPHY OF VERMONT

## WARD JUST



This is not an exemplary story, though some of the angles should be familiar. There are no exemplary stories of my "generation," which I narrowly define as the one which had only the dimmest memory of the spring and early summer of 1945, the explosions of Little Boy and Fat Man, and the end of the war in Europe and Asia. No recollection of the beginning of the war, only its end; and now it is only the memory of a memory, news of one holocaust half the world away. My older brother, born in 1935, has had a different experience altogether and my younger brother, born in 1948, is dead. Thirteen years separated them; it could have been fifty.

But this is not the story of me or my brothers. This is Hank Beers' story and in telling it I am conscious of disjunction. I think of my own life as a timorous negotiation with a roulette wheel, Beers' as anything but. Nothing has encouraged me to believe in direct cause and effect, anything reliable. It may be, as Hank maintained, that life is a row of falling dominoes but my experience is that the dominoes are arranged haphazardly and like the headstones in a New England graveyard some are erect and others aslant; they are secure or unstable depending on age and the soil in which they are entrenched.

I have always been fascinated by the careers chosen by my friends—this one became a lawyer, that one an insurance executive, another one a screenwriter and now it seems impossible for them to have been anything else, yet they chose carelessly. These three men I knew in college and have kept up with ever since. Tommy has written my will and George has insured my life and each Sunday I faithfully turn to the entertainment section of the paper for news of Carl's latest movie or television serial. They are not alike in temperament but I believe with a different throw of the dice in 1964 it could be George writing films and Tommy writing insurance and Carl writing wills. They agree.

"Hank Beers," Carl says, believing he has clinched the point. Hank Beers, the exception that proved the rule. Hank Beers, who never wanted to be anything but an architect, who even as a student was regarded as a professional. It only serves to emphasize the difference between us to point out that none of us has commissioned a Beers house, nor would ever consider doing so.

We four came to know Hank at New Haven. He was a friend of Carl's sister Charlotte and was finishing up at the architecture school. He was two years older than we were and it is unlikely we would ever have come to know him except for the connection with Char. Hank was not our kind; he was the first zealot I ever knew, a true believer whose sect was architecture. I remember him well in those days, large, muscular and long-haired, always carrying a t-square and slide-rule, his conversation dense with the vocabulary of construction and design and always with the look of the magician about him, as if one day he'd turn and gesture with the t-square and the Divinity School would vanish and the Bauhaus rise in its place. He was tolerant, if puzzled, of Tommy, George, Carl and me, who had no idea what we would "do," only that it should be agreeable and somehow significant. However, the prospect of a Goldwater administration was moving us

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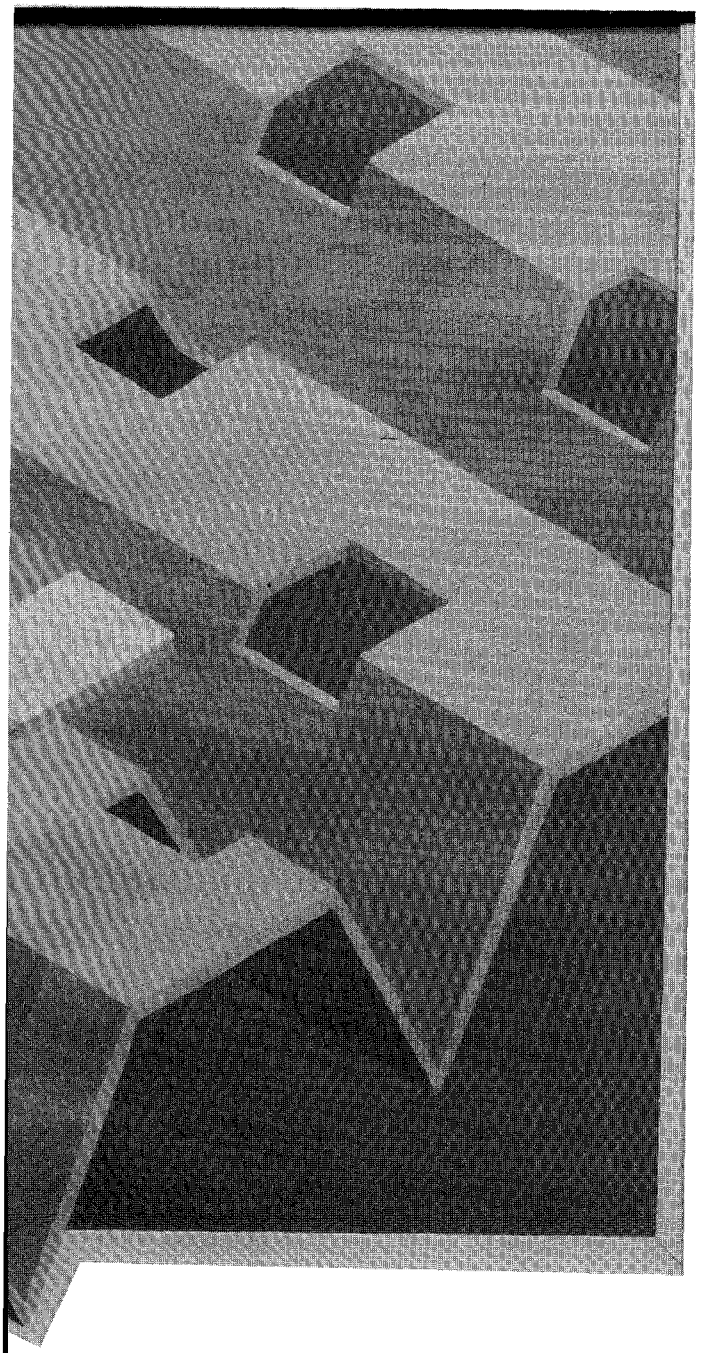

rapidly to a decision, any decision so long as it precluded military service. In 1964 that was a definite possibility—"a definite poss," in the phrase of the time—so Tommy eventually went to law school, George got married, Carl had a long talk with his family doctor, and I joined the Peace Corps.

Hank Beers did nothing. Listening to the four of us scheme, his eyes would glaze and turn inward and he would mutter,

"Negative energy,"

nod at Char, and in a moment they would be gone, off to his apartment to talk about buildings. She was a second-year student at the architecture school and believed Hank the genius who would lead American architects out of Le Corbusier's concrete wilderness. *Hank Beers,* she said, emphasizing the name as if it were one that we had *better remember,* possessed a sublime mind and transcendant spirit and would in time become a master, the Wright or Gropius of his generation.

We listened politely. Charlotte was openly condescending to the four of us, so immature, so unfocused and dubious about what we wanted to make of ourselves. (George was to enter the family insurance business, and Carl's doctor had found an obscure allergy which required rustication on the West Coast). The last three months of our senior year we were stoned most nights and it was a noisy *schadenfreude* with which we greeted the news that Beers had been drafted and was due to report to the infantry one month after graduation. He had done nothing to prevent it, in fact had ignored the government's notices until receiving one by registered letter that threatened prosecution.

Stupid, Carl told his sister. Fatally flawed, your Hank. A man with no sense of the future, and no grasp of the way the world worked.

You understand nothing, she said.

I understand enough to know he's going to that pointless war, Carl said. And he could've avoided it.

She said, When it's done, it's done. *Hank Beers* doesn't care about it. It doesn't matter to him at all. It's a matter of no importance.

Carl said, No importance maybe. Consequence surely.

You still don't get it, she said.

I listened to all this, enchanted. Hank Beers may have lacked simple common sense but he did not lack attraction for women. This woman was fighting mad and it was obvious as she argued with her brother that an attack on *Hank Beers* was an attack on her.

"Adolescents," she said finally. "Spoiled brats, all of you. *He* doesn't care about it. It doesn't matter to him at all. *It is not worth his attention.*"

This was true. The last three months of the school year he was engaged in the design of a three-family communal house. Nothing else was important to him. The truth was, he didn't have the initiative to do what nearly every other Yale graduate did, which was find ways and means to avoid the army. There was nothing patriotic about it, he simply couldn't be bothered spending the energy required to avoid the draft; as Charlotte said, it was not worth his attention. Later, obliged to think about it, he reasoned that three years in a law school or four in a medical school or in the Peace Corps would be three years or four away from architecture, so what was the point? It never occurred to him to falsify his medical history and the idea of marrying someone and becoming a father as a way of placing himself beyond the reach of the authorities was ludicrous. He did not intend to become a breadwinning family man at twenty-three; he intended to *build.* He might as well be in the army and it was typical of him that once committed he began to consider military architecture. Surely they required architects as they required riflemen. Possibly some of these architects had gone to Yale or to M.I.T. and, who knew, given the chance he could design a concrete bunker in the manner of Le Corbusier, a none-too-subtle parody. Bunkers were the



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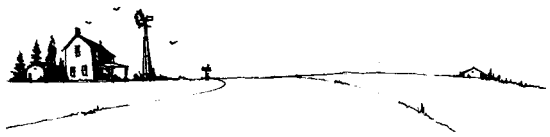
same the world over, the design had not changed since Wellington, and could be a fascinating structural problem, perhaps each bunker could be self-contained; circular, wings feeding off a central War Room and prefabricated so it could be moved easily from place to place as the front shifted, a circular building could be easily disguised from the air. . . .

His enthusiasm was infectious and after graduation he and his friends went ardently to work designing the Corbu Bunker, amid wild laughter. Beers always carried jokes to an extreme. He approached the dean of the architecture school and asked him to write a letter to the Secretary of the Army. The dean liked Beers (everyone did) and thought him a highly original student. He wrote a serious letter and a reply came by return of mail, a two-sentence reply from the Secretary himself. The first sentence read, "Thank you for your letter." The army was satisfied with the architects it already had. It did not need architects. It needed riflemen.

He had been lucky all his life, indulged by fond parents, enjoying robust good health, and knowing exactly what he wanted to do from a very early age. In later years he came to believe that the luckiest he had ever been was in 1964. He had the good luck to be drafted in that year and do his time in the zone before the war became criminally dangerous. He had the further good luck to be assigned to G-2 (Intelligence) owing to a high I.Q. and a fluent knowledge of French, learned solely to understand and therefore dispute Le Corbusier. Stationed at Pleiku, he never fired a shot in anger and was remote from the violence of the war.



All this was in retrospect.

He did not consider it lucky then but knew later that he was *very* lucky to be twenty-three and out of graduate school in 1964 and not in 1968 because in 1968 he would have fled to Canada or Sweden rather than fight in the war. In 1964 he would have been hard put to locate the war zone in an atlas, it was just another noisy episode on the eleven o'clock news, random news—casualties in Turkey, fatalities in Bolivia—that filled the room, unheard, while he bent over the drawing board late at night. Scotch-taped to the wall in front of him was an anonymous mountain panorama, Vermont in deep winter, an aerial shot of a pristine slope and rectangular fields where it leveled off into a narrow solitary valley. From time to time Beers would glance at the picture as a sculptor would at a model. He was visualizing the location of the three-family communal house, it would be *there* halfway up the slope, a southern exposure and protected from the northwest wind. The television set was always on but never watched or heard, so the war was far away.

In 1968 and later a number of his younger friends went to Canada or Sweden rather than fight in Indochina. Most of them had the support and blessing of their families but the act took something out of them. Ten years later they were still in search of themselves and nostalgic—wanting to feel again the romance and vitality of resistance. Of course there were others who were simply down and out, then and now. In a way they reminded Beers of the veterans of the same period, embittered and angry at the indifference of the government and the short memory of the population. Both groups, those who went and those who didn't, were in thrall to the past. The war was the single most important event in their lives, and perhaps always would be. And there was no question, none at all, that if Beers had been called up in 1968 or later—with the issue of the war always present, a specific problem that required a specific solution—he would have gone to a neutral country, too. The war would have made its claim on his conscience and his ambition and he would have refused to go.

So he was lucky in five ways. He had gone to the war, had not killed anybody, had not been killed himself, had assimilated the experience—and had an extraordinary moment of revelation.

This happened one afternoon in November, 1965, near the end of his tour in the zone. He was flown to a mountain village to interrogate a defector. The helicopter touched down in a clearing outside the village, then flew away leaving Sp/4 Beers standing alone under a hot sun in a rice field, so excited he was trembling. Before him, framed on three sides by jungle, was a settlement of a dozen houses, deserted and immaculate, the houses vivid in their primitive austerity. They were raised on short stilts, dark wood against the green of the forest, sloping roofs thatched with bamboo. The structures seemed to him in some mystical harmony with the curving chaos of the forest and the high hills rising beyond, all of it as spare and radical as Euclidean geometry. The rising heat made the field shimmer in the bright sun and he saw the settlement as a mirage. He closed his eyes and then opened them, imagining the dark hills drenched in snow, with open fields here and there for perspective. The straight lines of the houses defined sanctuary or refuge as the forest defined hazard. The houses were built into the forest, not taming it but complementing it; the houses had their claim and the forest had its, neither impeaching the other. He thought immediately of the maestro, Frank Lloyd Wright—how astonished Wright would be! Beers wanted to devise a mountain style as Wright had devised his prairie style, the buildings enhancing the land as the land enhanced the buildings. He had dreamed of working in rugged Vermont, feral terrain, and now saw his ecstatic dream declare itself. Always he had known that his conceptions were ingenious in detail but inchoate in the sum, a series of brilliant images that tailed away into confusion. He had waited for his vision, knowing it was there to spring up some lucky day, not something you could hasten or force but something simply allowed to occur. Patience, optimism and confidence were always rewarded. Dominoes never fell of their own accord.

An American officer was waving at him from the village. He heard shouts. Still, he could not move. The sight delighted him. Then, rising from his reverie, he shouldered his rifle and began to move slowly toward the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houses. He looked at them now with a practical eye. How deep were the footings? What was the precise angle of the slope of the roof? The ratios, floor to ceiling? *How had these people managed so exquisite a balance between the architecture and the geography?* It was breathtaking, this chaste and formal balance.

A hundred feet from the settlement he paused, suddenly unnerved and terribly afraid. He had never been afraid before, he was a rear-echelon intelligence man. It was very quiet in the field, he heard his own breathing and the whirr of insects. Even now, *right this minute,* he thought, the Viet Cong could be surrounding the village, sappers in the forest just beyond the silhouette of the buildings. It was their terrain, and they would fight for it as he would fight for his; and they would prevail. The American officer disappeared into the house and Beers knew for a certainty what he must do. His mind was as uncluttered as the vision before him. He knew that if he remained he'd be killed, enemy fire, friendly fire, a random accident or disease. He could not allow that to happen and knew then that the time had come to seize the future. Seize it or lose it. He took a last excited look at the village, burning it into his memory.

Then with a quick positive movement he pressed the trigger of the M-16 and shot himself in the foot.

From this distance, fifteen years later, it is tempting to read too much into Beers' decision to wound himself, "a stateside wound." But it was symmetrical: In the beginning the war wasn't important enough to notice and in the end it was too important to ignore. He spent a month at Walter Reed and the remainder of his tour at the Pentagon. The army released him unconditionally after a month, an honorable discharge—he was a staff man and demonstrably incompetent with weapons so it was not surprising that when he tripped he thumbed the safety and accidentally discharged the weapon; of course there was nothing suspicious in his record, nothing to indicate he was in any way a malcontent or subversive or cowardly. He walked out of the Pentagon one day in February, took a cab to the nearest automobile dealer, bought a second-hand Jeep on the spot, and headed north.

Beers had money, not a great deal but enough to purchase three hundred acres on the slope of any mountain in the Northeast Kingdom. In 1966 land was cheap. He spent a month cruising the frozen roads north of St. Johnsbury and in time came to know the country towns as well as he knew the suburbs of his hometown, St. Louis. There was Barton, East Burke, Johnson, Newport and half a dozen others, interchangeable until you spent time in them and learned their characteristics. Beers divided the territory into grids and drove methodically, knowing exactly what he wanted. It was February and each day seemed colder than the last, but when he saw likely terrain he would stop the car, haul on his snowshoes, and strike out cross-country.

He wanted an enclosed valley that was already populated, a place where the land was worked but not yet exhausted. He did not want lush country with gentlemen farmers—lush country, indeed!—of the species found in the southern part of the state, stocky gray-haired men who inspected their cattle in jodhpurs and J. Press jackets out at the elbows, accompanied by accountants from Morgan's bank. The Northeast Kingdom was something else altogether, impoverished but not yet exhausted, redneck country: dirty white clapboard farmhouses with television aerials that resembled radar apparatus, ancient barns and tractors, mutts, tomcats, snowmobiles and abandoned sedans rusting in the front yard, the windows broken and the interiors filled with snow. Close to God and Canada. Weathered men, husky women and sly children. Beers believed he could inspire the region, his own sense of possibility encouraging the inhabitants. New blood! And if he failed, it was as it was; but not for lack of effort.

The plan was this. To buy three hundred acres at one end of the valley, the northern end to take advantage of the southern light; in Vermont, all valleys ran north and south. Each house would be backed into the mountain, protection against the northwest weather. This was timber country so he would find a parcel with a logging road and subdivide along the road. His partners would buy into the venture in two-acre lots. The remainder would be common land and wild forever. There would be orchards and a meadow to support sheep and vegetable gardens, panoramic views and cross-country ski trails and a market town nearby.

Lab conditions.

In the end Beers found exactly what he wanted and bought it after a week of fierce haggling, the owner suspicious because he could not imagine the use to which the land would be put. Irritated by Beers' beard, he believed him a draft-dodger with Communistic tendencies until Beers casually mentioned that he was a veteran. He did not display his damaged foot with its livid scar but was prepared to do so in order to secure the land; he'd cooked up a story to go with the scar. After the documents were signed, the older man told him about the original inhabitant of the mountain, a recluse and migrant from Portland, Maine. His shack still stood near the top of the mountain, more than a hundred years old now. Beers was interested and pressed for details, but there were no details. The recluse disappeared in the early nineteen-twenties, 'twenty-one or 'twenty-two, he couldn't rightly recall; simply disappeared, no trace ever found. Disappeared into the forest as a fallen tree does, returning to the earth, dust to dust.

What was his name? Beers asked.

The older man didn't know, or couldn't remember. In the region he was known as the *old* bastard. But the shack still stood. When he offered to draw Beers a map to its location, Beers demurred. He wanted that pleasure for himself.

"I'll find it," he said.

There were five friends, all former classmates, and he wanted them to join him. These friends were working in cities and bored in the usual ways. They were restless and avid for adventure, a life more dangerous than "inking" for senior partners and designing dentists' offices in Larchmont or Winnetka. Carl's sister Charlotte was the first to reply, writing Beers that Vermont would be her Canada, a refuge from conscription into the American way



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of life. She was not a flamboyant woman so she did not say that they would build the New Jerusalem, but that is what she meant. As for Beers, he could scarcely wait to replicate the serene village and the forest surrounding it. All one, the structures, the forest and the community of architects, each complementing the others in unexpected ways, isolated from the random violence and cheap success of commercial America. In 1966 Hank Beers was twenty-five years old and saw himself as an explorer, the Magellan of a great movement that would change the visage of the nation.

That June his five friends joined him and by Thanksgiving they'd built their first house, in which they lived communally. It was a cooperative project though the design was pure Beers. A failure by the standards of Yale or M.I.T., the house bore scant resemblance to any house in the mountains of Pleiku province or anywhere else in Indochina. Only Beers saw the connection, the structure converging into the terrain and somehow an extension of it. It seemed to be an exercise in angles, most of them oblique; there were no curves anywhere. It was like living inside a trapezoid that leaked. It was very exciting to look at and daring to live in, though Charlotte complained that the atmosphere was often hostile. A trapezoid schizophrenic, she called it. Living under radical angles, it was in no way cozy and always disconcerting except when one was smoking grass. The trouble was, one never forgot for a moment where one *was;* she thought in that way it resembled living at Versailles or a state prison—though she agreed, too, that it was extraordinary and somehow suited to the land, the steep slope of the mountain and the enormous thick-bellied spruce, the spruce in snow looking like benign hoop-skirted women. Perhaps it was disconcerting, inconvenient and hostile and in those ways a failure, but she knew, and the others knew, that they were on to something original. There was no dwelling like it anywhere in America. And as for being a "failure"—that depended entirely on the definition of failure, and by Beers' definition it was not a failure at all but a conspicuous success. Beers' design set the example for all the houses to follow: a precipitous perpendicular, fitted snugly into the womanly spruce.

Other friends arrived that winter and the following spring and summer. Beers' mountain became a waystation on the underground. Many of the visitors stayed on, camping out, and before the end of 1967 there were twenty people in more or less permanent residence, a few of whom bought land though most wanted only to stay a while and observe the construction. (Much later Beers would see this as an early version of the California light bulb joke. How many architects does it take to build a house in Vermont? Twenty. Six to build the house and fourteen to share the experience.) It was a time of great entertainment and consanguinity, the six original settlers had three ideas a day and energy to burn and now there was an audience. Beers had never been happier and if he had been in the least political the experience of the first year would have turned him to Marxism. *Class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the whole nation.* That was true, even the visitors contributed in their own way; they were like foreign correspondents come to view the future working. *Political power, properly so called, is merely the organizing power of one class for oppressing another.*

There were no politics on Beers' mountain, nor oppressors.

To which my older brother, with the generosity of spirit that has characterized all his works and days, replies, "Believe that and you'll believe anything."

## 2

It existed as a haven, "form follows function," and in those days was certainly not unique. There were similar settlements all over northern New England and if many of them now seem romantic relics of the flybynight 1960s, flotsam casually tossed on the beach from the storms of assassination and war and just as casually returned when the weather eased, it only serves to emphasize the durability and good character of those that did survive. Let no one believe it was easy. The seasons in Vermont are more oppressive than any ruling class. Keeping the egos in harness, maintaining idealism and allowing a certain self-indulgence and failure for failure's sake without it all degenerating into a woodsy free-spirited Gulag Archipelago, was hard work requiring subtlety and persistence. By the early 1970s there were seven houses, Beers' the centerpiece. Scarcely a week passed without a delegation of architects from one city or another arriving to inspect the famous mountain, the houses that were now part of it, and the Gropius of the movement, Beers. While almost no one "approved," everyone was fascinated. Original. Utterly original, they said, without knowing exactly how to approach the designs. Unfortunately, there was nothing useful to be learned from them; or so it seemed to conventional minds. The houses were unlivable in the strictest sense, impractical, uncomfortable, and clumsily constructed. (The amateur builders had not begun to solve the structural problems presented by the professionals' advanced designs.)

Interesting, a Boston architect wrote in a critique published in *Architectural Review,* in the way a thumb-screw is interesting.

It was fashionable to believe that Beers had painted himself into a corner. The houses were coelecanths, cul-de-sacs off the main stem of western architecture. They would survive, as the coelecanth survives, but nothing would come of them. They were situated beautifully into the mountain and thrilling to look at; but they were not of the real world, and not for any theoretical reason. ("He has tried to construct a countercultural Shangri-la and failed dismally," the Boston architect had written, seeking political significance in what he had seen and disliked so.) It was simply that the angles were too numerous and aggressive and therefore unsettling—"hostile," as Charlotte said again and again. It was as if Beers was indifferent to how people actually *lived.* To that accusation he replied that he wished to change the way people lived. The hostility was in the mind's eye only, a learned response to God knows what. The memory of barbed


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wire. The mystery of the Pyramids. Beers did not find his house hostile; he had learned to live in it. And of course he knew its provenance. He never spoke of his vision in the zone. Only Charlotte knew of it and she was sworn to silence. He conceded the connection was mystical, but most spiritual occasions were. At any event Beers' prediction that the hostility was temporary turned out to be true; the longer one lived in a Beers house, the less threatening it seemed. Beers argued that it would take a lifetime to adapt completely.

Like a spy behind the lines, she joked.

No, he said. Like a fish in water. "We are the water, the structures are the fish."

But in the narrow world of modern architecture Beers' buildings were seen not as a beginning but as an end. The mountain came to be known as Dead End and in the mid-1970s the delegations ceased to arrive from New York, Montreal and Boston. It was old hat by then.

I arrived at about that time. In fact it was 1975 and after eleven years in the Peace Corps I was tired and stale. I had joined up in the summer of 1964 to avoid the inevitable war and with some vague idea of carrying on John F. Kennedy's legacy, de rich man's burden in de southern latitudes, "waging peace." I went to Morocco, which was interesting, then returned to headquarters. In early 1969 my younger brother, Timmy, was killed in Indochina. I stayed on in the Peace Corps *faute de mieux;* one more turn of the wheel. I knew my work had nothing to do with John F. Kennedy's legacy or any legacy. The Peace Corps was by then a mature Washington bureaucracy, no different from the Agriculture Department or the FCC. By 1975 the city seemed terminally ill, a chronic invalid wasted by assassination, war and scandal, and the building in which I worked increasingly came to resemble a mausoleum.

I cannot fairly present myself as a casualty of the 1960s. My brothers are the casualties, Timmy because he is dead and Lew because he turned a blind eye to the decade, sailing through it like a Bourbon king, nothing learned, nothing forgotten—but I was a witness, and that gives me a claim on Hank Beers and the other inhabitants of the mountain, and the spirit that animated them. We had risen through the years together and everything that rises must converge.

I resigned on May 1. I knew of the mountain from Carl, who was in constant touch with his sister. I had no reason to remain in Washington so I decided to visit Beers and Charlotte and see what they had made of their lives. I had money enough for a year or two and had an idea that I would write a memoir of life in the Peace Corps. But that was secondary to my interest in Beers and Charlotte, who seemed to represent so many of the hopes we had had for ourselves in the early 'sixties. I began by saying that there are no typical stories of my generation, and surely that is true; Hank was in no way typical. Still, we shared a few goals. We were distrustful of leaders and institutions and like the radicals of the 'thirties we opposed people who pushed other people around. Above all else we believed in personal happiness and that each person had to choose and the more audacious the choice the greater the likelihood that it would prove "correct."

So I drove to the Northeast Kingdom, where Charlotte had arranged for me to live in the topmost loft of Hermann Goring's house. All the men had nicknames. Hermann Goring was a Californian of German birth. There was Fido, Slugger, Dirty, Banjo, A-Frame and Bad-debt. The women did not have nicknames. In the beginning Beers was cordial but remote. I commenced my memoir right away, believing it necessary to appear occupied at serious work. Beers' mountain was like a nation, with its own laws and history, language, economy and cuisine. Its cultural pull was as strong in its way as Morocco's and I did not want to succumb. I resisted as I had in Morocco years before all too easily seeing myself as some character out of a Paul Bowles story, gone to seed in an unfamiliar climate, drenched in kif and damp memories. Beers' mountain seemed to combine the most dramatic features of a religious retreat and a men's locker room.

It was a month before I had my first serious conversation with Charlotte.

"How do you like it?" she asked. We were at a party at Banjo's house, though perhaps "party" gives it a formality that is misleading. The volleyball game ended at seven and then everyone went swimming. Slugger and June Bell drove into town for hamburger and beer. We ate by the side of the river and then everyone adjourned to Banjo's. There was a shifting population on the mountain, arrivals and departures every week, many of them women. There was a women's house down the road from Hermann Goring's and the women would check in there first, and remain or not as they chose. Sexual arrangements were loose without being chaotic. There had been two marriages but the couples had left after a few months, preferring to live closer to town. The place had a relentlessly masculine atmosphere which most of the women found attractive; Charlotte was an exception.

I said it was all new but fascinating. The mountain suited my mood in ways I didn't entirely fathom. I felt the need to say something agreeable so I shook my head and said I couldn't understand the complaints about the construction. Hermann Goring's house was watertight and evenly heated, altogether as well built as any house I had seen anywhere.

She nodded vigorously. "That was a bum rap from the beginning." They had always known those problems were merely structural and would be solved in time. "They were *not easy* to solve," she said, looking directly at me. "But we knew they would be and of course the nitwits that complained about that in their tight-assed little articles in the AR haven't acknowledged it." She looked away and I saw her eyes fasten on Beers, surrounded at the other end of the room; he was telling a story and the others were laughing. "You're here at an interesting time." I said nothing. Charlotte had always been very direct, assuming you knew as much as she did. She never bothered with background information.

"That one," she said, pointing at Beers. "He understands it. Not so sure if he understands the implications."

"The bum rap," I said.

"No," she said. "The fact that the problem's been solved. That's what's important. It was solved two years



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ago, essentially it was a problem"—she moved her hands together in the manner of a pilot demonstrating an aerial maneuver—"of receiving surfaces." She went on to explain the breakthrough, Beers' inspiration, A-Frame's carpentry. She made it sound preposterously simple, as obvious as the design of a light bulb.

"I see," I said, following the bureaucratic principle of never confessing ignorance about anything.

"It hung us up for years and consumed a lot of energy. Even though we knew the solution"—she smiled grimly at me, her Washington connection—"was at hand."

"Now it's solved."

"Has been for two years," she said, still smiling at me. When I didn't reply, she abruptly shifted direction. "This is a wonderful community. It's been my turf for nine years. It must seem weird to you as one of your government buildings would seem weird to me. Of course you and Carl . . ." She let her voice trail off. "You know last year we had our first birth on the mountain. I," she said, grinning broadly, "was an assistant midwife. Banjo's girlfriend, who's split now, though we're hoping she'll come back this winter. Wonderful person. Banjo's promised to fix the roof and"—she looked around the room, in motion now, a dozen people talking and laughing—"the other things." She said, "I'd guess before the year is out we'll have another wedding, probably in the meadow behind Hank's. That's where we have them, it's a gorgeous setting. Births, marriages. Then I suppose we'll have our first death, we almost had one three years ago when A-Frame fell off the roof. But we've been here nine years and Oh the people who said we wouldn't make it through the first winter. And we almost didn't."

Someone replaced the recording on the stereo and suddenly guitar music filled the room, loud and insistent.

I asked, "What about you?"

"That depends partly on him."

"Hank," I said.

"As I mentioned, though you didn't get it, the structural problems have been solved."

"Okay," I said. I had it now.

"This place lives on the horizon, always has, meaning something that's always in sight but never *achieved,* you know? That's the point of it. From my window I look down the valley and in the morning, early, when the sun's rising, I'll believe anything, anything in the world . . ." She paused, listening. "Hear the music? You've never heard of this group, I won't even bother telling you the name. Banjo has a connection in L.A. and she sent him the record, which hasn't even been released and we've been playing it for a week. You'll hear about it in a year or so, maybe later because it's *news,* this music. This music brings the news and you'll hear about it and then you can say," she said, laughing, "that you heard it here first."

I said, "New music."

"The cutting edge," she said, "you bet."

"So it depends on Hank."

"Mostly," she said.

"Is it true what they said? Carl told me."

"That he's in a cul-de-sac. Dead End Beers?" I nodded. "No," she said stiffly. "It is not true. God damn Carl."

I held up my hand. The music roared around us. "He was just reporting," I said. "It wasn't his opinion—"

"What Carl doesn't know about architecture would fill an encyclopedia."

"Wait a minute," I said.

"*Hank Beers,*" she said, and for the first time the tone was reminiscent of our days at New Haven. She hesitated, groping for words. "Understand one thing. Hank Beers decided to go up against Corbu. That's what he announced. He didn't know how he was going to do it, I mean the technique, he only knew that he'd make it his life's work. Corbu, the friggin robot. Anyway. I never knew a man with more ambition and more confidence in his ambition, even though in the beginning he didn't know how he'd subvert. That's what it was, subversion, because he was dealing with a *regime.* Then he had an—experience." She pressed her palms together, hard. "After the experience he knew what he was going to do and came up here and bought this place. *There wasn't anything here nine years ago.* Just this mountain with nothing on it except for the old bastard's shack near the top. No houses, no fields, and no community. Look around. Everything you see. He's done this—"

She went on in that way, but I was thinking of something else. Perhaps we all have buried within us the characteristics of the things we hate, but it seemed to me that Hank Beers' architecture was as fully dehumanized as Le Corbusier's, though it was clumsy comparing the plain materials and dramatic landscape of the Vermont community with Villa Savoie at Poissy. Corbu was parched and austere on the outside, Beers on the inside. His houses were unbeautiful to dwell in as Le Corbusier's were unbeautiful to look at.

"—so that isn't the point," she said, "and to say he's at a dead end is wrong and and and . . ." She stuttered, searching for the word.

"Charlotte," I began.

"—mischievous," she said.

I laughed, that was not the word I expected.

"Kiss my ass," she said.

"Stop the bombing."

"Eat it."

I said, "Still—"

"No," she said firmly.

"—what about you?"

She looked away and mumbled something I did not catch. The music was very loud now.

"I'm thirty-four," she said.

I knew what she meant by the tone of her voice, and I was surprised. In this environment I did not connect her with traditional values, a family, a husband, children, or any desire for them. I had a moment of satisfaction, things were not as unmoored as I thought; attractive women, even attractive women living unbuttoned lives in Vermont, still wanted the usual things. But of course that was not what she meant at all.

She said, "I did something on a lark, something without thinking much about it. I entered a competition."

I suppressed a smile. She said it as another woman might confess to one of the seven deadlies.

"What happened?"


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"I won," she said miserably.

"That's what happens on a lark," I said lightly. She looked at me and began to rise, slowly uncurling her middle finger. She was furious. I touched her arm and apologized. "I didn't mean that the way it sounded," I said, though the truth was I meant it humorously, nothing more.

She slowly resumed her seat.

"It isn't the worst thing," I said gently. "Entering a competition and winning."

"This isn't the Nobel Prize."

I sighed. The phrase then was not 'laid-back.' 'Laid-back' came later, anyway to Vermont; the next year, I think. But on the mountain there was an almost frantic willingness to discount any secular achievement. I said nothing, waiting for her to continue.

"It's important to have the right enemies."

I nodded. "Absolutely."

"My enemies, *Hank's* enemies, were judging this competition. Mine, Hank's, Banjo's, A-Frame's. All of ours. I didn't know that until after I'd entered. I didn't know who the judges would be, I didn't pay any attention to that. It was last winter, obviously we weren't building anything here, by Jesus there was one hundred and ten inches of snow on the ground and you couldn't get down the road for a week, so I just sat at the drawing board, waiting for a break in the weather. And I designed this *house.*" She looked away and I saw a smile beginning to form at the edges of her mouth. "Someone sent Hank these forms, thinking that he would enter, and the forms were just lying around. Well, it wasn't just someone. It was Hank's *mother,* who won't be satisfied until he designs Taliesin North. I sent the thing off when the weather broke and I could get to the Post Office, and didn't think about it again until I got the letter. I won."

"You won," I said.

"Five thousand dollars," she said.

"Congratulations."

"I didn't tell anybody, which was a mistake because Hank, like, found out about it. I don't know how." She caught the expression on my face because she shook her head. "He didn't care about *that,*" she said.

"Of course not."

"He was *not* jealous." She smiled. "Except maybe a little."

I smiled back, ready to support any move by Charlotte to begin the demystification of Hank Beers. Oracles were tiresome. So I said exactly the wrong thing. "I'm glad to know he's as insecure as the rest of us."

"He's not," she said, "but I take your point." She looked at me evenly, irritated again, and I was on the edge of proposing to her that I would try to forget her adolescence if she would try to forget mine. It seemed to me that we were mired in the nineteen-sixties, forever the upperclassmen and the graduate student, Carl's friend and Carl's sister. But that was eleven years ago, and I believed we had both come a long way since New Haven; and Carl had nothing to do with it any longer.

"Will you listen a minute?" I said.

"You really ought to make an effort to understand what's happening here. You made an effort to understand Morocco. Why is this so threatening to you?"

"It isn't," I said. It seemed impossible to me then to explain my life to her. The government, less yielding even than Vermont. Timmy. My brother's relentless cynicism and love of disorder. I did not have a large reservoir of faith.

She was silent a moment, then began to talk matter-of-factly. When Hank learned the identity of the judges he was merciless. They were all enemies, with the exception of one judge who was too craven to declare himself on the side of any one school. "It was like winning a humanitarian award from the Joint Chiefs of Staff."

"Hank said that?"

"Yes."

"How generous of him."

"It was true."

"I think it's for you to say, not for him to say."

She considered that, then looked away. "It was a competition for a row of houses in Newark. An urban renewal project. Federal money, the government has to approve. The government seal of approval." She smiled at me. "Does that make me an accomplice? Accepting the seal of approval of the government? Do I get indicted along with Hunt and Liddy?"

"Hank—" I began.

"Is still merciless," she said.

"You can give back the five thousand dollars."

"It isn't the money," she said patiently. "That isn't the point. They've offered me a job." She spoke softly, and I could hardly hear her over the music. "One of the judges has this firm in New York and he's offered me a job, pretty good job. Latitude." Then, "I have to let them know next week."

"And?"

"And it's a problem." She was staring somberly into the middle distance, her cool gray eyes thoughtful and troubled. The party swirled around us, a separate thing. "And I'm waiting for Hank Beers to decide where we go from here on the mountain. I've been with him for nine years and I'm not going to leave now, without knowing the direction he's headed. This mountain isn't just any project, I've spent most of my adult life here and I'm not leaving until I see—" She hesitated and I had the feeling that this was the first time she'd spoken the words out loud, giving voice to the thoughts that possessed her. "—how he's going to *continue,* and if it's going to be here or someplace else. He won't talk about it. I don't know," she said, facing me, returning now from the middle distance. "I just don't know if this mountain is large enough to contain . . . it's so private, you know, it's just us. We're a family and this is our homestead. We don't know the country. If you think of the country, our nation, as a body, this is the healthiest organ in it, but it's a very small organ and the body is huge and diseased and all the diseases are contagious. I don't know if he's prepared to *continue*—" She turned away again, openly desolate.

I moved toward her, wanting to console in any way I could. I did not know how to reach her in this state of Excellent Health. My time had been spent in the diseased nation. But it seemed to me that we were kin. We both wanted to do great things, the greatest things we



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were capable of, and that meant seizing new ground—for me it was moving to the mountain and for her it was moving off it. I was sure of that. Restless, we would always be restless, and *Hank Beers* would be forever at once mentor and deadly enemy. Just then a loud crash threw the room into turmoil. I began to speak, determined to ignore the commotion. One of the men had fallen and smashed a lamp. There was laughter and someone turned up the volume on the stereo. I was moved by her pride and her confusion; and I believed that she had come ever so much farther than I had. Suddenly Hank was between us, laughing and flapping his arms like a great bear. Sweat poured down his red face and he was shirtless and shoeless. Charades! he cried. It was time for charades! He seized Charlotte and moved away to the center of the room, calling for quiet. Three teams of four each. He and Charlotte and June Bell and Hermann Goring would comprise one team. Five minutes thought, then action! The room fell silent while he spoke, then erupted again. The joint came around to me and I took a drag, watching the sport. I saw Charlotte's oval face darken and then lift to look at Hank. He swept her up in a bearhug and began to spin in slow time and suddenly she was all smiles. Bad-debt was arm-wrestling with Slugger while Dirty took bets. An anonymous girl was asleep on the ottoman. I observed the melee through a thick blue haze, thinking how natural it all was, the irregular walls and high sharp ceilings, this eccentric geometry so appealing and harmonious, enhancing the pandemonium. Inside the restless motion it seemed to me there were fragments of twenty shouted conversations, a modern opera to the music of a slide guitar. Then they were playing charades, Charlotte perched on Hank's shoulder like a circus performer. There were shouted answers and laughter in return. I passed the joint and strolled blissfully into the kitchen to fetch a beer. The noise was deafening and incoherent, esoteric slang words and phrases which had meaning only to the inhabitants of Beers' mountain. I cracked the beer and stood with my skull pressed against the cool refrigerator door. Above me the ceiling soared twenty feet. The kitchen was pyramidal and I was standing at the epicenter, my head swimming, staring at the converging planes. In this moment of confusion I felt the blood drain from my head. I saw dark plywood walls, shadows dancing on the ceiling; the nails were bright as footlights. I imagined all the clamor gathered above me, sounds collected as a dealer collects a deck of cards, shuffles once, twice, then deals with razzle-dazzle—

The noise swelled, gathering motion, rising to a terrible crescendo, a mighty physical thing. The foundations trembled, as if assaulted by a force of nature.

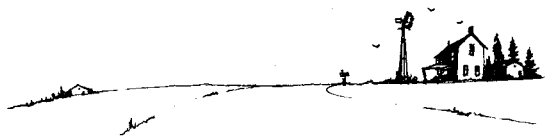
My last clear thought was that they had it wrong at M.I.T. Beers had proven them wrong, for whatever it was worth.

*Function follows form.*

Nothing happened quickly on the mountain. Hours of furious work would be followed by hours of equally furious play, and sometimes it was difficult to distinguish between the two. I never learned how they arrived at decisions; decisions somehow materialized after the hours of work and days of play. The human voice travels at 740 miles an hour and listening to them in the evenings was to gain a fresh perspective on the science of ballistics. Beers presided but he did not rule.

It was months before Charlotte was able to talk seriously with him. Of course the job in New York was no longer open, and I suppose a cynic would conclude that this was calculated by Beers. But Charlotte didn't think so. It was simply true that time, or the concept of time, was different on the mountain. One day was much like another, and chronology was measured in terms of construction schedules; foundations were dug in the spring. One ate when hungry; one skied anytime. It amused her, part of the charm of the mountain was the short attention span of the residents.

A kindergarten, she said, except when they were drawing. It was not unusual for them to work forty-eight hours at a stretch on a particular design, and at those times



they reminded her of monks patiently tinting illuminated manuscripts. They were less attentive when it became necessary to translate the design into a structure, a physical thing with dimensions, height, depth, width and weight.

The party at Banjo's was in mid-July. Charlotte spoke with Beers once in September, then again in November. She and Hank shared meals and occasionally bed and in important ways were as close or closer than many married couples, and she knew it was senseless to try to force him; he would talk about the future when he was moved to, and not before.

The November conversation was the decisive one. She told me much later that it was obvious Hank had devoted considerable thought to the future, and the ways and means by which he intended to "continue." Charlotte made me understand that she was in no way giving him an ultimatum, nor did she believe she had any right to demand that he disclose his plans. It was his choice, she said. But it was also true that she was thirty-four and restless. She did not have the power to change the mountain, nor would she exercise the power if she had it. Her point was this: She was changing, and she wanted to know if the mountain would change also. But she suspected that the laboratory days were gone forever.

The others had decided to go into town to a movie. When Hank declined to go with them, she knew they would talk at last. They sat in front of the Jötul, watching the season's first snowfall, and talked from seven in the evening until six in the morning. They began by reminiscing about the old days at New Haven. She found this charming and surprising; Hank Beers never reminisced about the pre-Vermont days. Charlotte was startled at his memory, almost total recall of conversations twelve years before, of designs begun and abandoned, the names of professors, buildings, books, telephone numbers, what they had said on this occasion or that, and the dreams they'd shared—



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"Corbu," she said, grinning.

He waved his hand in dismissal, but not before raising his eyebrows. They had not talked about Le Corbusier in years.

"The opposition," she said.

"Not any longer." He looked at her, the force of his personality like a magnetic field. She leaned into him, drawn. "I don't think about him any more. Corbu! He's as irrelevant as the Sears Tower."

She said, "Negative energy."

He hesitated, it was a phrase they used often in the old days. It was his phrase really, and it surely struck some chord deep in his memory. He said slowly, "That, too."

"Bear." It was an old nickname she seldom used any more. "Bear, who replaces Corbu? Someone has to. We're not meant for vacuums, either of us. We like to push and shove and there's got to be something *to* push and shove. And this—" She gestured around them, the stove, the glass sliders, the unfinished walls and all that lay beyond— "—do you work on this forever?"

"Can't keep her down on the farm," he said archly.

"That's damned unfair," she said quickly.

"What is it exactly that you want here?"

"Not what I want," she said. "I don't know exactly what I want. I want to know how you're going to continue. Then I can discover whether I want to continue with you. I don't know what it is you've got in mind any more. Always before I sensed a goal, though we never talked about it. Not cool to talk about goals, though I knew it was there and you did, too. I don't know where your ambition is now. I mean *what* it is."

"I don't have to justify myself."

"Not asking for that," she said. "If you never do another thing you'll've done more than any architect I know. No apologies, you need never make any. You can remain here for the rest of your life, it's enough. It would be enough for anyone, or almost anyone. This place, the community. You're the" —she smiled encouragingly— "founding father. And it's special, what we have here. But you're a large man, Bear. I'm surprised that you still find this stage—large enough."

He looked at her, expressionless, and moved to the stereo to replace the record. He leafed through the albums on the floor, then turned the machine off and stood in the silence looking out the sliders into the darkness; snowflakes bounced off the glass. He was silent a very long time and when he finally spoke he did not turn toward her but remained staring out the glass. "Nothing here when I came. Logging road, the old bastard's shack at the top of the mountain; took me three days to find it. Some iron spouts in the sugarbush, only signs of habitation. That shack, those spouts. That tough old bastard, think of the work it took, and the yield—only a few gallons of maple syrup. But apparently it was enough. Hard to believe but you have to believe it. As we both know, it doesn't take much to live in Vermont. Money." He paused and she was certain he was trying to visualize his predecessor, the mountaineer, his red face and huge hands, breath pluming in the cold. He said, "I bought it, the old bastard's legacy, and made something of it. We did. You, me, A-Frame, Banjo, Bad-debt, the others. Of the original six, four have stuck. The two who left weren't suited from the beginning, we agreed about that, weren't prepared to work in a community. Weren't suited after the first year and like, what the hell, this place isn't a Stalag. And Corbu doesn't come into it any more." He sighed, turning finally to face her. He wore a bright red shirt and heavy tweed trousers with wide white suspenders; she smiled at the trousers, two inches too short and the patching in the crotch coming undone. He'd worn the trousers for years, ever since she could remember. Leon Bean's best.

"So we've stuck and I suppose it's true that in terms of" —he hesitated— "novelty. Artistic orgasm. The mountain isn't what it was, or how we want to remember it. What are we doing, 'consolidating our position?' I don't know about that because it doesn't matter a god damned bit to me. Some nitwit sociologist from Yale was up here a few months ago, it was while you were visiting your folks, and told me we were a 'mature society.' Maybe that's so. Anything in this country lasts for nine years, maybe that makes it mature. But I don't care about sociologists from Yale. I don't give a damn about the outsiders who don't understand or care what we're doing here. What am I supposed to do? Come twelve times when that banker from St. J. tells me what a Boy Jesum Grahnd thing it is, I've cleaned up my act and'm paying off the mortgage, punctual with the monthlies, and how would I like some taxfree municipals now that the corporation has some loose change? That's all materialism and I don't like it now any more than I did then. This is what I have, right here, and I remember—"

"Hank," she began.

"—that village near Pleiku. That's what I've had in the back of my mind all these years and I've come closer to it. The idea of an idea. Than I ever thought I would. I *don't care* what they're doing in Newark or any place else. Go ahead," he said.

"Nobody comes here any more."

He shook his head, staring at her. "I don't care about that either. And I'm surprised that you do."

She said, "I'm trying to be honest."

"If it matters to you so much, you can count on it. They'll be back."

"I liked it when they came, so sure of themselves. They didn't know *what* to make of it, or us either. God, I loved watching them watch you and the buildings, muttering to each other. You could see their eyes widen and they'd all take out cigarettes at the same time, smiling a little because they knew they were going to have a dandy story to tell at the country club or the next A.I.A. convention. Then Banjo would appear with a beer in his hand and that woman, my God she must have weighed three hundred pounds, twice as big as he was. They'd watch all this, eyes getting bigger. Except there would always be one or two of them, the young ones, who were looking at the buildings, really *seeing* them, instead of looking at her and you knew they were coming away with something. You knew that for an afternoon you'd invaded their minds and life was no longer a series of twelve-by-sixteen rectangles and stylish ovals. They'd seen something new and while they wouldn't have the balls to do anything about it at



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least you'd touched them for an afternoon—" Her words came in a rush, tumbling from her, and now she laughed. "I've got a little of the preacher in me."

"There are no pulpits here," he said sourly.

"Used to be," she said. "And what's wrong with it? What's wrong with sharing it? Giving a little. It used to be, like, *fun* when those idiots from Boston—"

"That was before we were mature," he said, grinning suddenly.

"Pisses you off a little, doesn't it?"

He didn't reply. "As for the size," he said after a moment, "there is no larger place than this mountain. This is the world. The world is wherever you happen to be and there are no limits to it, and this is where I happen to be. And as for continuing." He reached behind the chair and brought out a rolled blueprint, spreading it on the floor, securing the four corners with empty beer bottles. She looked at it, puzzled for a moment. "Look at this. I'm going to replace *this* and *this*, eliminate them entirely, then tear down this wall. The stairwell will go *here* . . ."

She nodded, listening to him. It was a revision of the interior of his house. He was softening some angles and hardening others. As he explained it she was reminded of a writer revising a manuscript. The structure remained the same, though a sentence was turned here and there; one sentence in, another out. The writer himself would be the only one who noticed.

When he was finished she said nothing. Dawn was commencing over the mountain and far away she heard the sputter of a chainsaw. In the city you heard horns; here you heard chainsaws. The dawn was gorgeous, yellow over the brilliant white of the mountain. A foot of snow, the first of the season; it brought tears to her eyes just looking at it; her eyes filling, she watched the shadows shorten.

"But before I begin this," he said, "there's the small matter of wood. We're cutting this week and next. I want twenty-five cords before Christmas, not like last year—"

Maintenance, she thought. That was what it was in Vermont. One maintained in order not to break down. She understood suddenly that it was a pessimist's state—perseverance, patience, fatalism. The region was littered with false beginnings, buildings abandoned or burned, mills empty, fields lying fallow, the deer dying for lack of forage.

"—when we were caught short, you'll remember."

"Yes," she said. She stopped crying.

They sat watching the dawn, more brilliant each second. The corners of the house caught the light and held it. It was a house that worked best in the early morning and superbly in November, the month of its completion eleven years ago. It was designed for November's infrequent golden sun.

"Never again," he said.

"Happens every year. We run short."

"Remember, the first year? You couldn't get the hang of the chainsaw." He touched her wrist with his rough fingers, turning it. "I thought you'd torn the vein, it scared hell out of me. Dear Char."

She shuddered, remembering the look of her wrist, the ragged skin and ivory bone, blood everywhere.

"Lucky," he said. "You were lucky that day. This has always been a lucky place for you." Lucky? She'd almost severed her arm. "And lucky for me too," he said. "I've been lucky all my life."

"It's true," she said.

He leaned away from her to turn on the radio, the local station. They listened to it for the news and the weather, the weather always a presence and more important than the news. It was a radio station that had just three announcers. They had terrible voices and were unprofessional in other ways, but familiar and close as neighbors.

He said, "You're one of the originals. What's wrong with our life here? With what we've done? *What more could you possibly want?*"

She could not reply to that. What was it? She didn't know for sure, understanding only the restlessness inside her. She did not desire security, never had. She guessed it was the horizon. In the beginning the geography extended the boundary, *her* boundary, and now it no longer did; she felt pinched. She knew she needed to live with the horizon in sight and here it was closed off by mountains.

She rose. "I've got to think about it."

He said, "Negative energy." They listened for a moment to the radio, clear skies today and tomorrow and for the rest of the week, a high pressure zone centered in Canada . . .

He said, "I don't want you to leave."

They had been together for so long. "What's this?" She smiled, reaching toward him, snapping his suspenders. "A proposal of marriage?" Her dearest friend, he was closer to her than anybody.

He threw up his hands in mock horror. "Anything but that!"

Sunlight flooded the room. He looked as alert as a prizefighter before the bell. *Hank Beers*, forever refreshed. Looking up at him, his massiveness so close, she thought of him suddenly as a mountain, one of the Granite Hills; his steepest slopes would remain forever uninhabited.

He stood looking down at her, grinning. He said, "You're looking for another Corbu."

She shook her head, unconvinced; then she reconsidered. "Maybe."

"That's the difference between us, Char."

Oh? She smiled back at him. He was nobody's fool.

"You," he said. "I think you're the opposition now."

"I may be at that," Charlotte said.

## 3

At Christmas, Charlotte left. There was no note taken of the event; one day she was there, the next day she wasn't. Of course her absence was felt, she was the most practical of the original settlers, and for some time to come the mood on the mountain was quarrelsome and dis-



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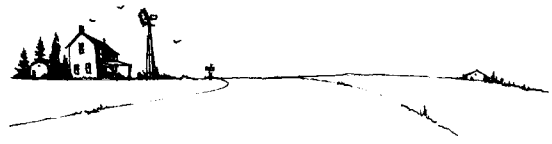
sonant. Beers was unapproachable during this period, throwing himself into a design for a house to be situated on the shore in Connecticut; he worked on it for months before resigning the commission, and returning his fee to the client.



Charlotte did not sell her house but gave it to the corporation, for use as a guest house "or whatever." That was sentiment on her part and the house was seldom used. Unoccupied, it deteriorated and five years later it had disappeared altogether. It burned to the ground one summer night in 1979, the only visible remains after the fire were the concrete footings and a year later they too had vanished, overgrown with brush.

I departed six months after Charlotte. I attempted a correspondence with Hermann Goring and with Beers but neither man cared much for the written word so the correspondence languished. In the late spring of 1980 my brother insisted I come to Middlebury for his son's graduation. After the ceremonies I began to reminisce about the mountain and in the course of talking about it I felt an irresistible desire to return. I talked Lew into driving to the Northeast Kingdom the next morning, lying about the time it would take us, and insisting he owed it to me to see the place where I'd spent a year of my life. A happy year, too, in retrospect.

I don't know what I expected. A condominium development, perhaps, or a Sports Center complete with racquetball courts and putting greens and a swimming pool occupied by debutantes in bikinis. But there was none of that, in fact there was very little change in five years. I noticed one new house, less extreme than the experimental models of the early years. Hank Beers' house had not changed at all. There was junk in the driveway and a rusting iron sculpture lying broken in the front yard. The Jeep was still there, though it hadn't run in years. Beers himself was nowhere to be seen.

Across the road a young woman worked the vegetable garden, topless. She waved cheerfully at my brother, who was staring. She must have been amused at his city clothes, the cord jacket and gray flannel trousers and penny loafers. I did not recognize her but walked across the road to inquire about Beers. She watched me, smilingly pulling on a t-shirt.

I asked her where Hank was.

"Gone up to town," she said. The Vermont accent was unmistakable. She didn't know when he'd be back, maybe an hour, maybe two. "You a friend of Hank's?" she asked, her eyes narrowing.

"I used to live here," I said.

She looked at me. My brother and I were identically dressed. She laughed, shaking her head, and went back to digging. Then, "You *did?*"

"It was five years ago," I said.

"I thought you was from Boston or someplace."

I said, No. Then I asked her where the others were. When she looked puzzled, I named them all, Banjo, Slugger, Fido, Hermann Goring. She shook her head.

"Those names don't mean anything to me."

"Bad-debt, Dirty, A-Frame."

She brightened. "Bad-debt lives over there. A-Frame's gone to Mexico."

"And Hank Beers—"

She smiled and cocked her head. "He lives with me," she said. "I come from around here. That's where Hank is now, with my folks up to town. My Daddy needed some help with the backhoe." I nodded. "Hank's helping him out. They're good friends," she said proudly.

"And Bad-debt?"

"Bad-debt got *married* last week," she said. "My Daddy married them in the church. Hank was best man. I was bridesmaid."

The preacher's daughter. She was so cheerful and composed it was impossible not to smile along with her, as if her information signalled an end to unhappiness everywhere.

"What's your name?"

I told her, and asked her please to remember me to Hank. I still wondered where the others had gone and turned to put the question to her. Surely Hank saw them from time to time. But she was bent over the hoe, our conversation apparently at an end. Perhaps then she remembered Hank's compulsive hospitality, for she looked up and asked if we, my brother and I, would like a glass of cold cider or a beer. I glanced at my brother, who shook his head.

I thanked her and then, backing away, asked her where the others lived now. She shrugged, a smile wide on her face. She didn't know, they had all left before she came. Hank talked about them sometimes. Sometimes they telephoned late at night and the men all laughed together. They were just—gone.

The geography of Vermont is different from New Hampshire. The mountains of Vermont are less majestic, and the valleys narrower and more self-contained. In the Northeast Kingdom the mountains are known as the Granite Hills and are gentle in contour, giving no hint of the hardness and density beneath. Of course Vermont is landlocked; it is an inland state in all respects. There is more forest now than at the turn of the century, owing to the unprofitability of lumbering the high country. Walking away, I thought about that.

I left my brother standing in the driveway of Beers' house and walked up the road, locating Charlotte's site. I knew about the fire and had difficulty locating her land. The forest had changed in five years, being both higher and thicker. I saw Slugger's house and on the other side of the road, Fido's. Both appeared to be deserted; they were certainly neglected. Farther up the road were A-Frame's and Banjo's houses, sturdy as monuments. I was surprised, the houses were not as conspicuous as they had been; the wood sidings had weathered, darkening, and they had grown into the maturing forest. The forest had welcomed Beers' houses at last.



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The atmosphere was wonderfully peaceful. Somewhere off in the woods I heard the banging of a hammer. But the sounds were desultory in the soft warmth of the June afternoon. I imagined the carpenter was thinking of a swim or a nap.

I hurried back down the road to Beers' house, confused by the change in five years' time. My brother was leaning against the car, smoking a cigarette and watching the girl in the t-shirt. I was unnerved and began to describe for him the way it had been, the clamor, stereos blasting from every house, volleyball games, barnraisings, men always shouting at each other. But my description was unsatisfactory, and sentimental because it bore no relation to the surroundings now.

"Well," my brother said at last. "Satisfied?"

I took a last look around. I wanted to burn the place into my memory so I could describe it in a letter to Charlotte. Still, I was reluctant to leave with so many mysteries still in place. I nodded at the girl. "She's very pretty."

Lew grunted. "She's very *young,* brother John."

We got into the car and I backed carefully out of the driveway. I waved again at the girl but she was concentrating on her garden and didn't notice. I drove slowly down the hill, unaccountably elated. My brother was talking but I wasn't listening. I thought of Beers remaining and Charlotte leaving and what that meant for them both. I had heard Char was happy, working productively in a prairie city. These surroundings gave no hint of Hank Beers' state of mind. Things were settled, though. Perhaps inside his house had changed and I cursed myself for not asking the girl if I could look around, inside. Perhaps he had made all the changes he'd promised Charlotte and promised himself, the result a sublime interior. Heavenly biases. An interior free of hostility.

My brother was still talking and I sneaked a look into the rearview mirror, a final glance at Hank Beers' Shangri-la. I saw it reversed through the trees, the twin triangular peaks soaring above the thick-waisted spruce. His was the only house visible. I remembered the first time I'd seen it, how I'd laughed out loud. A triumph of obliquity, I'd thought then. Delinquency. Megalomania. It did not seem so now.

Then we were off the hill and onto the highway. I was driving very slowly. A mile from town a damaged pick-up truck accelerated around a curve and was by me before I could react. It was Beers, unmistakable in his bright red shirt and white suspenders. I heard the horn and watched him bring the truck to a skidding stop. I reversed and presently we faced each other across the median stripe.

"Nego!" he shouted. My brother looked at me queerly. I had not told him my nickname. Beers had assigned all the nicknames, and mine was the diminutive of "negative."

"Had to come up for a look," I said. "Place's changed," I added.

"What did you expect?"

I smiled. "Extinction?"

"No," he said. "Transformation. Nothing ever dies. It's just transformed." He made a little motion with his fingers, like a diner asking for the check.

"Looks good," I said. I suddenly imagined him bent over his drawing board alone, turning frequently to stare out the window at the slope of the mountain, hearing crickets but seeing the land drenched in snow. Winter and summer would always exist simultaneously in his mind. I asked him what he'd done to the interior of his house.

"Come on back, I'll show it to you."

"Got to move along," I said hastily, indicating my brother. He had not said a word, leaning forward and listening to us talk. "An appointment in Middlebury."

Beers laughed, revving his engine. "Old Nego."

"Why not?" Lew asked, looking at me.

"No," I said, my tone harsher than I'd intended.

"I'm John's brother," Lew said.

"I guessed," Hank said.

"We're late," I said. I reached across the pavement to shake hands with Hank Beers. I did not want to go back with him. I had my own conception of the mountain and did not want it tampered with. The nature of the transformation did not matter as much as the fact. I suppose there was some fear in that, too, either that he had failed completely or succeeded wonderfully; either of the above. I preferred to believe the latter because if the last two decades had taught me nothing else they had taught me the necessity of mystery to faith. I said, "Good to see you, Hank."

He put the truck in gear. "Ever hear from Char?"

"Christmas card," I said. "Nice card, it's a drawing of your house in winter, a wreath on the door—"

He nodded, pulling away. "I know. Poor Char." I put my car in gear and we separated at a crawl, both of us leaning out the window looking at the other. Then with a wave he was gone, gathering speed as the road rose in the direction of the mountain.

Lew was silent a moment, then began to chatter. It was some family matter, a personal complication. I nodded at the words but did not truly listen. I was trying to apply the austere lessons of Hank Beers to my own life, and not succeeding. We had started the 'sixties together and had lived through the 'seventies, he maintaining in his way, I in mine. Of course I had returned to the government. This was a fresh decade and for the life of me I could not decide which of us had a purchase on the future. I was suddenly sympathetic to him and wanted to believe that as he succeeded, so did we all. But that was nonsense. He managed to endure in an extreme climate, and what could that imply for the rest of us?

My brother touched my arm. What do you make of him? Lew asked. "Give me the word, old Nego. What is he? Hermit? Guru? *Agent provocateur?* Prophet? Coward?"

God damn Lew. But this is not his story, is it? Or Timmy's. Or mine.

I said I imagined Hank Beers today and for all the days to come at work alone on his mountain, blending into it and continuing to grow and thicken. His houses would remain, some deserted, others not. He has not forsaken and is not forsaken. He is thirty-nine, and his dream still surrounds him. I explained to my brother that it was a metamorphosis, this conversion of Hank Beers into a feature of the geography of Vermont. □



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RICHARD TERRILL

# AT THE LAKE: TO A BROTHER BEFORE MARRIAGE

As she steps from the car I see her
as she is, the withered legs
of palsy, the stooped back—how she wants
no help around the mud and water
that have settled in the driveway—
the way she grasps your hand.

For a moment I watch my hands
stutter and shake, then look to hers
—the same—yet I look away
not to stare at the legs
which do not do what she wants
but tremble and waver like water.

We walk through the yard to the water
at an uneven pace. The sun is a hand
that smooths the lake and shore. The willows want
to grow together. The sapsucker waits for her
mate on the backhouse, then wings away.
You offer cheese and the chipmunk climbs your leg.

We settle into chairs with beers; the legs
bow some with our weight. Near the water
our women lie. We half-talk in the way
we did as roommates, our hands
turn circles, not saying what we want,
then you speak; "I'm myself with her,"

"I'm going to marry her,"
and then the plans, the money, how her legs
are getting stronger with work; you'll want
a family. Forgive me: I imagine whiskey and water,
you at bedtime, not wanting to go, the way
you must lie with her, how you place your hands.

She struggles to us and clasps your hands.
You rise, you lean against her.
She will not back away,
but braces lightly against the legs
of the largest willow. *What I want,*
*this is what I want*—you walk to the water.

Legs that walk at all can walk away.
With my voice of water, I say what I want;
brother, let your hands hold each step of her.



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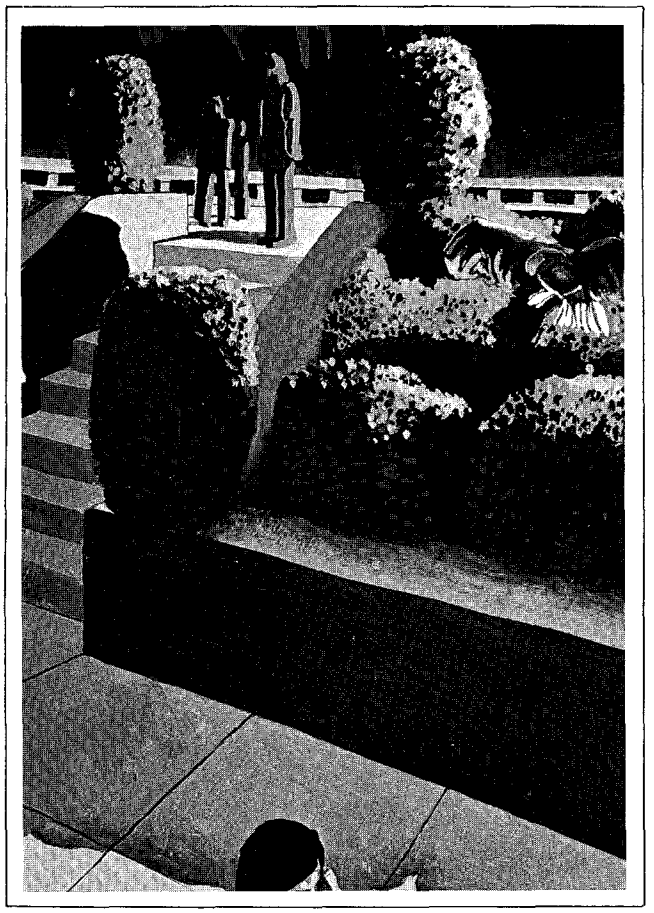
Karl Kim Connell

# THE BICYCLE MESSENGER



*To CAF*

Nine to five, Monday through Friday, while radiators hiss and sirens wail, I bicycle through Manhattan traffic with the finesse of a ballerina and the conscience of a hammerhead shark. Bicycle messengering is "piece work," I get paid by the delivery, so the faster I go the more I make—all the lights are green for me. I stop for no fire engine, squad car, or ambulance. When I get my legs pumping the pedals down the steep hill on 35th and Fifth—look out—that boy is going, going, gone!

Those primadonnas who tour the Alps on 300-dollar toothpick ten-speeds wouldn't stand a chance on a half-mile run from Movielab to TVC: one pothole and they would be pedaling a pretzel. Let them suck exhaust pipes for a day, and nine out of ten would be hooked to an iron lung in St. Luke's.

This muggy morning, as I walk my cheap three-speed bicycle down five flights of stairs and through the piss perfume of my tenement, I remember the dumpy pad that my old friend, Tanya Silk, the dancer, and I had on Mott Street. There, the bums not only pissed in the halls, they slept in them. Tanya just wrote and asked me to come to Paris and live with her. Most guys would jump at the chance, but I don't mind the work I'm doing and I'm leery of Paris. I got busted there two years ago. If I got in trouble again and ended up having to serve my 18-month suspended sentence, I don't think I'd find the expatriate life too glamorous. Sampling French jail cuisine I can do without.

Smog hangs low over the city as I step out into the Hell's Kitchen district on Ninth and 49th and augurs a day that'll have heat so thick you can hump it. Since I dropped out of Columbia after a year and a half, I've been messengering for seven months. A long time: most messengers quit after seven days. I can see why when I hit this Times Square traffic: I don't know how I take it after my morning meditation. Silence, pure inner silence, then—HONK! SCREECH! "YA ASSHOLE!" Pedaling through traffic is like open field running in football. I watch the cars, see an opening, and sprint. Simple, except for one thing: the tacklers are ten-ton buses.

At the cramped office of Mobile Messenger Service on Madison and 54th, already the phones are ringing themselves off their hooks, the dispatchers are frazzled, and a horde of messengers are begging for runs. I push through the crowd, catch a dispatcher's eye.

"You ready, Richard?"

"You bet."

"Take out two tickets, here's a couple short runs: pickup upstairs, room 1013, drop at Barimex. Then pick-up at TVC, drop at Quest. You know where those are, don't you?"

"Do I ever." At Barimex, Rita will be ready to plug me into her switchboard. I've only known her a month, but she's got her own private switchboard room. And she can lock it.

I make the pickup upstairs. It's just a letter. I slip it into the red canvas delivery sack on my back. In Paris they would send something like this via *pneumatique.* I hit the street and race through traffic *vachement vite.*

"Look out!" I shout.

Christ on a bicycle, are pedestrians blind! They only pay attention to cars. Speaking of which—

No! What's that limousine doing? A U-turn in the middle of 57th Street? The limo may have DPL plates, but my bones don't have diplomatic immunity. I squeeze

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my brakes until the cables almost snap and sink my ragged sneakers into the asphalt as the bike skids sideways to a stop. A cab squeals to a halt inches behind me. Jesus, its engine is hot. I'm getting sautéed in my own sweat.

I shake my fist. "Get that limo out of my way!"

"Sir, I'm only trying to—" the chauffeur starts to say in his English accent.

"Listen, man, stick it."

He makes his turn and I'm off and running toward Rita. I blitz through a red light and blow my whistle to warn a doddering old lady that she better drop her three-pronged cane and tap dance out of my way. It looks ridiculous to have a whistle stuck in my mouth all day, but it's saved my ass more than once. I don't have time to fiddle with a two-bit bell on the handlebars when I have the choice of kissing the grill work on a cement truck or running into a 200-pound construction worker. Plus, who would listen to the tinkle-tinkle of a bell when a wrecking crane has just swung its steel ball into an old brick building?

Yellow? Can I make it? No! And lucky I didn't try or I would have smashed into that Chevy which jumped the light. I know this job is suicidal, but so am I, I love it. Dad has tried bribing me to go back to college—says he'll pay for everything. But I don't know what I'd do there. Poetry? Pre-med? All I know is I have five hundred in the bank. I could leave for Paris today and have Tanya dance into my arms tonight. With her frizzed-out red hair and tight black leotard she looks exotic all right. And that's the way I like my women: the stranger the better.

The light is green. I jack my ass in the air and pump the pedals. Go West, young man, on 57th. Midtown Manhattan is laid out in a square grid of north-south, east-west streets. Glad I don't have to deliver in Paris. Its streets snake all over. Two years ago I got busted there. For a quarter ounce of grass I had the pleasure of spending two weeks in a French mental hospital. Pretty nurses delivered breakfast, lunch, and dinner to my room, all courtesy of the French government.

I pull my horse up and hitch it to a parking meter. I use two locks: a solid steel U lock ("The Citadel"—you need a blow-torch to bust it) hooks through the rear wheel and frame. I slam shut a bolt to close the U. Then I padlock a chain to the front wheel and frame. I got more money in the locks than I do in the old clunker because in Stiletto City anything that can be taken will be taken. Once I had the seat unbolted from my bike while I was wolfing down a Whopper burger ten feet away.

In the lobby, mirrored ceiling and polished floor reverberate into infinity. With the heat and traffic noise shut away, it's amazing how the space in these huge lobbies can almost make me feel reverent.

Here's the right elevator. I get in and try to meet the eyes of a good-looking girl, but she turns away. Elevators are the one place where I feel defined by the job I do rather than by the person I am. Trapped elbow to elbow with people dressed up for business, I feel like a schmuck in my messenger rags. Secretaries my age or a little older don't even see me. (I'm a "dumb messenger.")

I get off and make my drop with the bespectacled secretary. She's the shy type who, if she took off her glasses and let down her hair, would be beautiful. I get the ticket signed. No signature, no pay— I learned that my first day. I stick the ticket in the red plastic wallet Mobil gives us. At the end of the day, we go back to the office and add up all the tickets and see what we've made. I average close to forty bucks.

"Miss?" She's filing some big stacks of paper. "Miss?" When I get her attention again, I ask to use the bathroom. But after taking in my dark glasses, long hair, and dirty t-shirt, she refuses to let me piss. "Company policy," she says.

I cross my legs to fake holding it in. "Please?"

"Well. . . . OK."

I wish her a typo-free day and scoot down the hall to Rita. I open the door quietly. Her back is facing me, and she's plugging away at the switchboard that fills a whole wall in her tiny white room. Her lithe brown arms pull out wires, plug them in. She talks fast—sometimes in Spanish, sometimes in English. She's dressed in red velvet shorts and a blue t-shirt that fits her like a sheath. I sneak up behind her, kiss her neck.

"Richard!"

"*Yo tengo un poco.*" I slip a tiny tinfoil packet out of my wallet.

"Cocaine?"

We snort the coke and talk. Her unemployment checks are still coming in even though she's had this job for three months. Her two little kids haven't gotten into any knife fights at the day care center, and her ex-husband just got busted for dealing smack so he won't be coming around any more to beat her up. Life is looking good. She is thinking of going to night school to become a para-legal aide for poverty lawyers. Yes! She stands up and wraps her arms around me. The switchboard buzzes. She wriggles out of her shorts, pulls my cut-offs down. The symphony is about to begin, but the board buzzes buzzes buzzes. She can't stop working so she spins her chair around so it faces the door, pushes me down on it, and hops aboard. Her sleek brown legs straddle mine. She reaches over my shoulders and pulls the wires out, plugs them in.

Bzzz. "Barimex. . . . Yes, he is in."

Rita, O Rita, my perverse Mexican punk rock cocaine addict, yes, the connection is fine. I read you.

The lights reflected in her eyes blaze as the board goes wild. There must be a riot at the Stock Exchange. She twists the swivel chair. Chubby Checker, rock 'n roll, shake me, wake me, oh! How can she make it do that? The harmonious cacophony of voices is crescendoing. The sensory input blacks out the entire city. We've incited a riot of breaking and entering, looting and carousing. Sirens scream. . .

"Miss Ricardo, the calls aren't—Miss Ricardo!" Aghast, the secretary drops a stack of manila envelopes and runs down the hall. Knee deep in memoranda, we struggle to get our clothes on.

I curse. "We forgot to lock the door."

Footsteps in the hall. The bald boss arrives, surveys the scene, turns red: "This is the last straw, Miss Ricardo!" He huffs and puffs and blows the house down: "You're fired!"

"My children won't eat!"



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"Get unemployment."

"She already does," I say pulling up my fly.

"What? Get out of here, punk."

"I'll see you tonight, Rita?"

And first I see it welling up in her eyes, then she explodes, firing Spanish epithets at me till I'm riddled as swiss cheese.

In the lobby I wheeze and hack. I can't even keep a relationship going a month. Revolving doors make me dizzy, then the heat! It's risen ten degrees in the past half hour. Maybe I should leave town. This city just ruined a grand passion. But Paris . . . the bust. . .

I close myself off from the world in a phone booth to call Mobil for another run. Like every pay phone in Manhattan, scratched on the phone's silver coin box are the words "Worship God." I stick a dime in. I never see my bosses except at the beginning and the end of the day. The rest of the time I just hear their voices over the "Worship God" phones as they steer me through the streets. Birth, death—hey, I bet you could call this job a metaphor!

"Hello, Mobil, hold on."

Oh, no, on hold once again. The clock is ticking, time is money. Tick tock: you can plead with the clock, you can curse it, kiss it, kick it, but you can't beat it no how. This job is crazy. Pickup, drop. Pickup, drop. Either you're ricochetting around town, or you're stuck at a dead stop. And now Rita hates me. My only woman in New York. . . .

"Hello, Mobil."

"Hi, this is Richard at Barimex. I've got a pick up at—"

"Keep moving." Click.

On hold and they don't even give me another run. Shit. I'll finish off the last sprinkle of cocaine. Rita was the best, but Tanya, Tanya, with that constellation of freckles across her face, those dancer's legs. . . . Losing a switchboard job would be a joke for her, easy come, easy go.

I snort the coke, snap out of the phone booth, and pump some pizazz up the glassy Grand Canyon of Sixth. Pedestrians are crossing against the light. I blow my whistle, see an opening, thread the needle, and break into the clear. I whip around Columbus Circle and—

CRASH!!! Fireworks fly as I run broadside into another cyclist. My head reels as I try to stand. "Got insurance, buddy?" a passerby demands. I ain't got shit. Our bikes are locked in an embrace, spreading the communicable diseases of collision. Miraculously, my bike is unscathed: not a bent fork or a flat tire. His ritzy, light, but easily broken ten-speed is mangled. Am I lucky.

But wait, this cyclist guy is BIG. "What are you? Blind? You fucked up my bike, man." He's decked out in a leather biking helmet, racing shoes, white satin tank top, and shiny red shorts. His ferocious Fu Manchu mustache quivers. He lifts up his fists, slow and mean. People start forming a ring around us.

"Sorry, I didn't see you."

"Sorry, huh? I'll make you real sorry."

I stick my shades in my back pocket. We circle. He winds up a haymaker, steps towards me, I duck—POW!—an uppercut bashes off my cheek and into my eye. Crazy colors flash in the sky. I bounce off the human ropes and back into the ring. This guy is serious, he's coming at me again!

Suddenly a cop collars the big bastard and says, "What's going on here?"

"He ran into my bike!"

"You wanna go in for assault and battery?"

"He busted my bike!"

"Shut up! I didn't see no wreck, but I did see *you* hit *him*." Copper turns to me. "You wanna press charges?"

"Ah . . ." I look the big, duded-up cyclist in the eye. I want to make him sweat, but I've also got to make some money today. "Well . . . I guess not."

"OK, I suppose you can go," says the cop.

"Thanks, Officer." I grab my horse and plow out of the crowd. The cyclist yells over the cop's shoulder, "Hey, you, you owe me money."

Send the bill to my broker. I'm whisking through work on my private jet. Where's the caviar and Ritz crackers?

I make the pickup at TVC. It's a can of film. Whether it's a porno flick or a baby-food commercial, I don't know, and I don't give a damn—just as long as it's light.

On the elevator down a lady is wearing a scent skunks would shrink from and Christian Dior sells for 80 dollars an ounce. It's the type of thing Tanya shoplifted last year when we didn't have a penny for a pinto bean.

As I head back downtown, traffic thickens. Pedal, stop. Car engines congregate in a huddle of heat. Overhead, air conditioners weep on me. Pedal, stop. My eye begins to swell and throb—what a punch. Red light. Stop, stop, stop. Once you lose your momentum on a bike, it's hard to get it back.

I cross my arms over the handlebars, hang my head, and wait. O Tanya, wiry wand of a redhead, ballerina, and the only 19-year-old skate board freak on Rue Monsieur Le Prince with a written warning from her dance company director to stop skate boarding or else. If she breaks a leg, he'll send her home. In her letter she asked me to come over and tell him what's what. I'd like to tell *her* what's what. If she loses that job, there's no way I can come over and see her. The photo she sent me from *Le Monde* of her in a leotard and tutu while schussing downhill on a skate board is cute. Maybe it's even a good PR ploy, but, man, she's got her career to keep going. A busted leg, even torn ligaments would be no joke.

At last I plunge into a cool lobby, make the drop, and ring for a run. Once again they put me on hold.

This is the *Waiting for Godot* time of messengering. The dispatcher is God, and I'm in purgatory. I light up a Decade. Smoke spews out of me. A second becomes the Sahara. I grind out my cigarette on the mouth piece of the phone and (I wish) on the ears of the dispatchers.

How well you do in this job is finally just luck. Whether the dispatchers keep you on hold or not, whether they give you short runs or long ones. Fat chance I have of doing well today. No matter how fast I pedal I can make up only so much lost time. And the faster I go, the easier it is to wreck.

No wonder no one works at this for long. The job's only appeal is that you don't have a boss leaning over your



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shoulder and cracking the whip. No boss—except the clock—which whips everyone, everywhere, in the end.

I look out the window and listen to the phone static. A decrepit old foot messenger in baggy pants shuffles through the smoke billowing from manholes. Hell, if I don't figure out what I'm going to do, I'll end up like him.

Forever on hold. . . . I think of Tanya. Besides dance (which is wingless flight) she loved her birds: a macaw, a parakeet, and an African love bird. I always cooked dinner and she, after having lit the candles and let the birds out of their cages, ate in the nude. Almost blind in the candlelight, the birds flew about screeching and crashing into walls. With a tipsy African love bird perched on her wine goblet, she once toasted me saying, "Here's mud in your eye." The love bird hopped on her head as she drank and—sure enough—dropped a little mud in her eye.

O Tanya, a true Space Cadet, completely gone, no deposit, no return. But since we've known each other for so long, is there still any hope for romance? Like on a bike, once you lose your momentum, it's hard to get it back. And Paris, the paranoia, no job there. . . . I don't know, I don't know. I always have trouble making up my mind. I spent five minutes this morning trying to decide whether to use my blue toothbrush—or the pink one!

At last I get a run. An awful one. The pickup is around the corner at a locksmith's. But the drop: three miles north at the Jewish Museum. The package is an "oversize." A twenty pound hunk of lead that barely fits in the red sack on my back. It's a box in plain brown wrapping paper that smells of glue from the wrapping tape. It rattles as I turn to go.

"What's in here? Lead statues?"

"Combination locks for the museum's lockers."

Great. I can barely pedal carrying this thing. My sack's strap cuts into my shoulder, the package's corners stab my back, and it shifts from side to side, almost pulling me off my horse. A bus revs its engine, engulfs me in exhaust. I hold my breath and choke under the whip of the sun.

My bike's wheels kiss the hot black tar with a smack. *Keep moving.* I squeeze north through Times Square. *Keep moving.* The revolving sign says it's 94 degrees, I say it's 100. *Keep moving. Keep moving. Keep moving.* The bike's seat slams into my crotch as I hit a pothole.

At last I reach the park in one piece. No cars are allowed on its driveways today. I am in paradise, at peace. Pigeons coo. Their pink feet plant placid tracks in the burnt-out grass. I roll past Bethesda Fountain and pump slowly up a steep hill. I think I can, I think I can. My thighs hard as nightsticks, my eyelids clenched from the strain.

Something cracks my skull. *Hosanna* rings in my ears. I hit the ground, my shades shatter, the light is blinding: two greasers stand over me. "Don't move," one hisses. I have no intention of doing so. I'm in utter bliss, stretched out for the first time today. Where's my mint julep? I feel like singing "Way Down Upon The Swannee River." A third charming little angel tugs the bike out from under my ass and takes off downhill. The other two relieve me of my delivery burden. Hot dog, I can knock off for the day!

The euphoric effects of the blow wear off. Reality sinks in. "Help! Help!" I start to get up and nearly pass out. I stand on the broad park drive utterly alone. Buildings crouch at the park's edges. I sink to my knees. I put my filthy fingers in my mouth, yank it open, and scream. Newspapers swirl in a sky the color of a World War II penny. This is the end. A bomb-bay view of Nagasaki. My life is over, cashed in, no shirt, no shoes, no shit.

I take the keys to my locks and throw them away. A lot of good they did me. If I buy a new bike, I'll have to work for a week just to earn back the money. I've got five hundred in the bank. Tanya has a job and a pad. She'll support me for a while. Why have I been blind all this time? Paris isn't haunted. I'll panhandle once I get there, play my ukelele in the metro, pick grapes, anything, but I'm not going back to Columbia—shit on toast, let me out of here! I've lost my girl and my bike—both in the same day! Give me a taxi to the bank and a ticket for an airplane.

Far out, there's a middle aged lady in a tennis skirt trying to pump her bike up the hill. The front wheel wobbles. I lick my lips. Her Jackie Onassis-style dark glasses glint in the sun. What does she need the bike for? Exercise? Hell, I'll give her some exercise. Just as the handlebars shake and the bike lists to starboard, I charge! A flock of pigeons flushes. She shrieks and falls off—I don't even have to touch her—just grab the bike while she stutters in horror.

I burn rubber down Fifth Avenue. Thirty blocks later, I screech to a stop, and just as I'm about to toss the bike in the gutter, I notice it has a name tag: Mrs. Gertrude Crookshank, 379 Madison Avenue. That's only a few blocks from here. What do I need this thing for? I'm not going to take it to Paris and be a messenger there, that's for sure. I wheel the bike in with me. The Chase Manhattan Bank, main branch on 43rd and Fifth: forty foot high ceilings, huge white pillars, only two or three patrons in a mahogany cathedral. All sweat and spittle, stinking like a Bowery bum with my right eye swollen shut, I saunter down the marble floors in my shredded Keds. I place my hands on the counter, lean over, and say, "I'd like to close my account."

Then I call Mrs. Crookshank's and tell the maid to come and pick up the bike at the bank. "And thank Mrs. Crookshank very much for letting me borrow her bike. Bye-bye." I leave it with a teller and withdraw from my safe deposit box my passport and my last half gram of cocain. I snort it all in the cubicle. Suddenly I'm schussing down the French Alps at 100 miles per hour—in an avalanche of ecstacy, a whiteout, WHOOOOSSSSHHHH!!!!

Outside, faces intricate as snowflakes blow by. . . . All I need now is a Dutch Masters Cigar and a stewardess rhythmically stirring my Scotch on the rocks.

Oh Tanya, my friend, from where I stand now I can see the world: the flags of a hundred countries whip in the wind over the outdoor restaurant in Rockefeller Plaza. For a second my battered face and black badge of courage are reflected in a blind man's dark glasses. I drop some change in his cup and stride into TWA's ticket office. There is a long line, but I am no longer on the run, I have made my last drop, given the padlocks to some greasers who left a lump on my head instead of signing a ticket. The only thing I have left to deliver is myself. □



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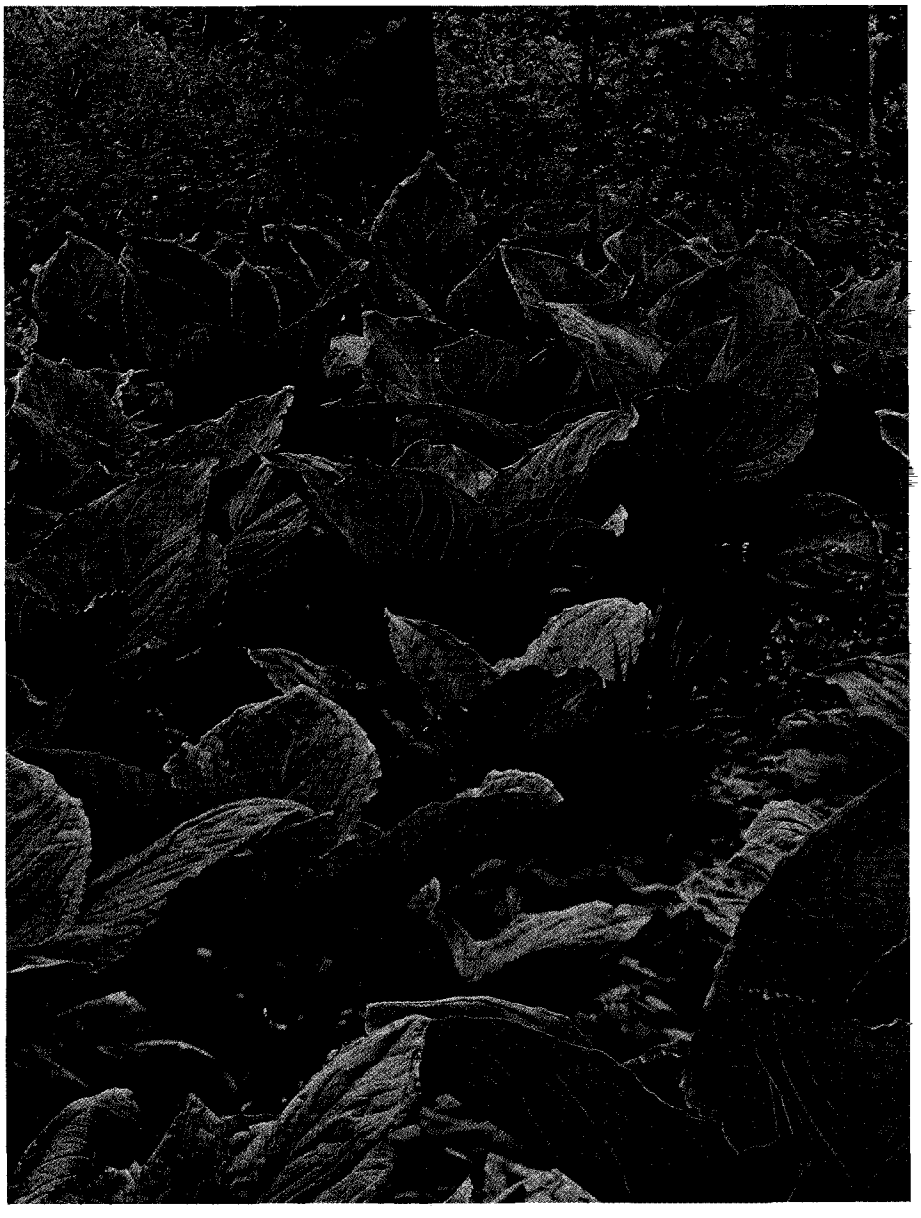
# ". . . a panacea for hea rheumatism, skin sores and b muscle spasms, and plain old

Skunk Cabbage is the answer—*Symplocarpus foetidus*—also known as collard, meadow cabbage, pole cat weed, pole weed, skunk weed and swamp cabbage."



Once that might have been the travelling pitchman's cry to attract attention to this most interesting plant, and while we don't recommend that modern men and women use the plant either for medicinal purposes or food unless they know precisely what they're doing, many of the early pioneers and several American Indian tribes found the Skunk Cabbage a valuable and therapeutic plant.

What makes this plant so interesting besides its strong odor?

It is one of the first plants to bloom each year—early February in most places, even before the snow has melted. In New England it can begin blooming any time from mid-November to early March.



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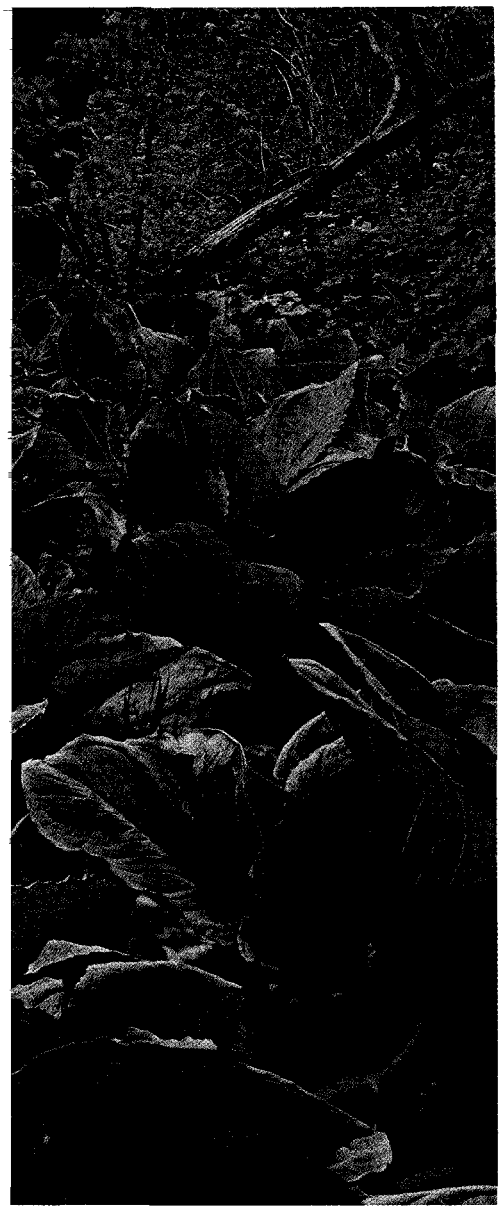
# ıe, toothache, ringworm, asthma,

# :s, dropsy, respiratory difficulties,

# ioned hunger."



Carl Kurtz

How can this plant bloom when others are still dormant?

Skunk Cabbage creates its own "tropical" environment. The Skunk Cabbage can be found blooming even when the air temperature is -14° C because its own temperature is +30° C and as the temperature drops, its respiration rate increases.

Remarkable? Yes. Why? We aren't sure.

How can these plants be saved so further research can be done to discover their hidden secrets?

One place where you find them preserved is at Hanging Bog in Linn County, Iowa— one of The Nature Conservancy's 670 preserves across North America.

The Nature Conservancy is a national conservation organization committed to preserving natural diversity by protecting lands that contain the best examples of all components of the natural world.

Since 1950, The Nature Conservancy and its members have been involved in the preservation of over 1.6 million acres in 50 states, the Virgin Islands, Canada and the Caribbean.

Vital forests, wetlands, prairies, mountains, islands, and places like Hanging Bog—refuges for threatened wildlife and rare plants, places of special beauty—remain protected because the Conservancy and its members cared and acted quickly.

These safeguarded areas are a record of our accomplishments, a promise for tomorrow and legacy for the future. Memberships in the Conservancy begin at $10.

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

1800 North Kent St.,
Arlington, Virginia 22209.
(703) 841-5300

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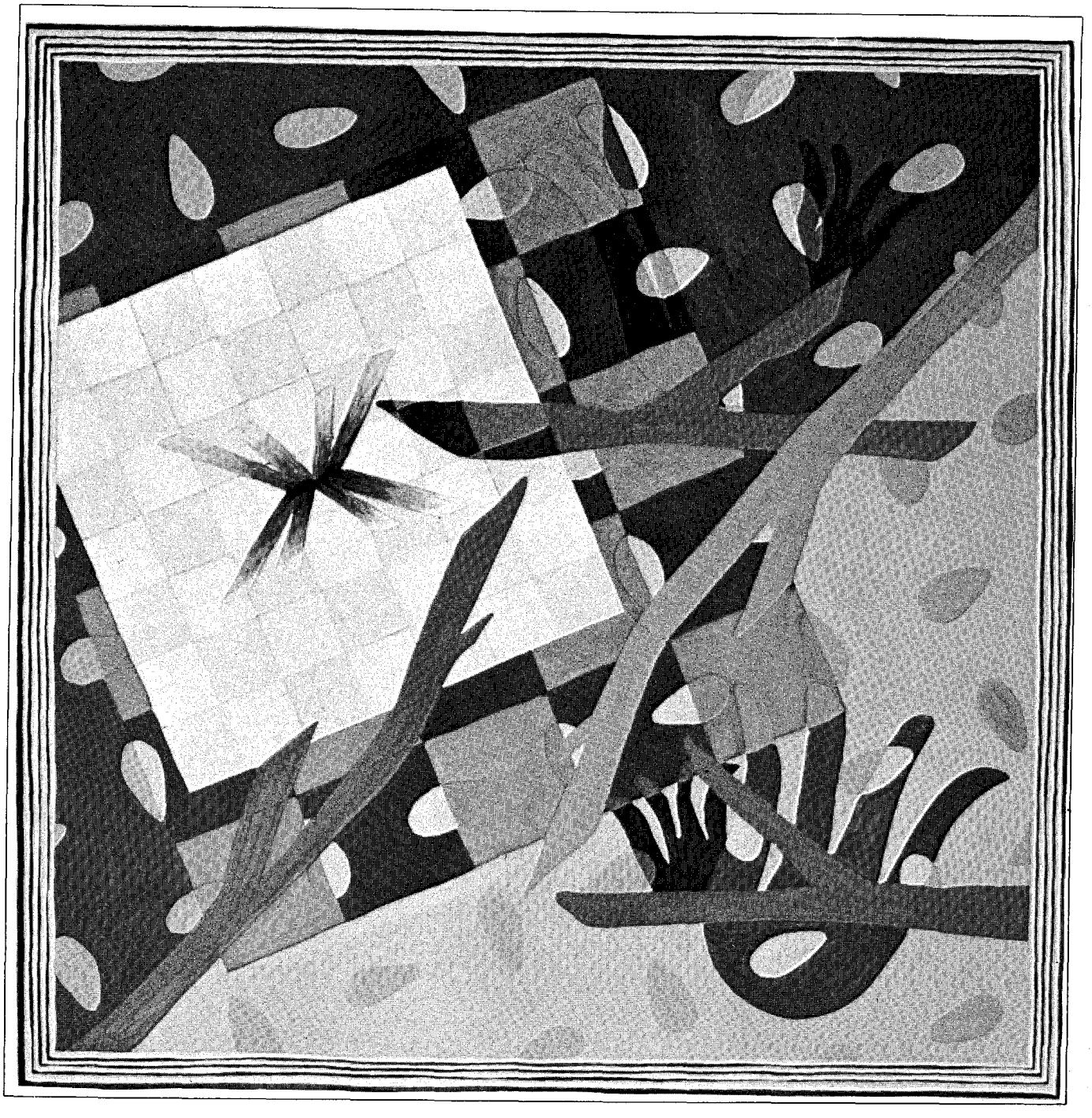
Maria Thomas

# SUMMER OPPORTUNITY





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Mr. and Mrs. Warren P. Stegler request the pleasure of the company of *Ms. Gwendolyn Johnson* at a reception on *Tuesday July 2* from *7:00 - 9:00 p.m.*

182 Embassy Crescent
Kenyatta Ave.

RSVP (regrets only) Tel. 01627

and written below: *To welcome Ms. Gwendolyn Johnson to Lagos, Summer IDI program.*

Gwendolyn leans back, fingers the invite like a playing card and takes a drag on her Benson and Hedges (airplane stash: duty free.) She tries it on, "Beens'n 'n Hey-ges! Whooooo? I say, Ben-Son and Hedge-Es." She tries IDI, "Ah-Dee-Ah," laughs around a little and says, "I.D.I. spells In-ter-na-tion-al Deee-vel-op-ment In-tern. Me." Summer program means minority program. Minority summer opportunity. An opportunity for a minority for a summer.

"Gwind'lin!" her mother had shouted when she had heard about the trip six months ago, "You AINT goin to NO AFRICA!"

Gwendolyn's mother never got used to minority opportunity. Way back in fourth grade in Mississippi, sometime in the early '60s, little Gwendolyn had been selected to integrate at the white school.

"Oh yeh, well they's 'on haf ta come git you!" her mother hollered, and when the white social worker showed up to drag the girl off to school, Ida Johnson (five foot ten and two hundred pounds) picked up the skinny pale lady and heaved her out of the front yard—never opened the gate.

But they finally got Gwendolyn for the ninth grade and kept her right through high school. She had no friends save that skin and bones Ralphy Williams, the other minority with an opportunity. Those two looked like Jack Sprat and his wife. Gwendolyn was already beginning to look like her mother. But she did very well in school and graduated in the top 15% of her class. She was selected for an IBM minority training program. It meant she would have to go to New York. The night before she was to leave, Mrs. Johnson set fire to her suitcase while the girl wailed in her room and her brothers and sisters roared with laughter.

She had to stay home. Miserable. Fat Gwendolyn. In her room, she ate potato chips, drank Cokes, cried herself silly and read novels. Her mother wanted her to forget IBM and get a job in town waiting tables or running the cash register at the local grocery store. "You work for black folks or you be sorry," she said. Gwendolyn refused. She was too ashamed to be seen around town. She tried to explain to her mother that she had been given opportunities. Now she was a failure. And no fault of her own.

"I coulda gone places," she told her brother Melchior. "Don't you let Mamma tromp you down." Melchior also went to the white high school and was already at the top of his class. Melchior told Gwendolyn not to worry; he had an idea that would take her places. From the library at school, he got college catalogues for his sister. Black Colleges. Exclusively for black kids. Melchior's idea was that Mamma would agree to that. And so it was. Gwendolyn: on a big scholarship to Howard.

"Satan's own Washington!" her mother moaned.

"Chocolate city, they calls it," Uncle Charlie said. And they pressed the frightened Ida Johnson into agreeing.

Gwendolyn threw herself right into things at Howard. Before she had been there a month, this Melchior sent her a little button said "Black is Beautiful." And it was. Howard girls with their Afros and tinted shades, their slender butts and their bouncey bra-less tits. Howard cats, tall, flat bellied, shiny big afros, dashikis, sandals and pants tight along their slick sides.

Gwendolyn did not date. She was too fat. But the kids liked Gwen. She always had the joke. At Howard she got herself a style. She wore huge tent dresses in bright African prints, cut her hair into a huge high Afro and covered herself with lots of cheap bangles and necklaces. She bought lots of big fringed shawls.

Now, one day, over on 11th Street, this Gwendolyn is walking, humming and swaying her lots of flesh side to side. She just made honor grades again and feels she's on the way to something special. She's just a leeetle high—a post-prandial pipe with Walter Jackson and Sally B., a Washington spring, and black folks out and turning on. In the window of this little hole-in-the-wall-factory-to-you-prices no name shoe store, Gwendolyn sees the sandals of every woman's dreams. No white cat shoe man ever made those steppers.

"These shoes," the man inside tells her, "are custom designed. One fine lady over Alexandria had them made special. But like it go," he says, "she hit bad luck. Never come git 'em. Now, young lady, you ain't never gonna see a-nuvver pair of shoes like these!"

Gwen smiles, puts them on, and struts her stuff, just a little top heavy on those four inch platforms.

"On'y the fines' leather," the man tells her—thin leather straps in twelve dark wild colors woven into dazzling baskets out of which peeks the shocking pink of Gwendolyn's toes.

"Ever place you goes," the man says, "people gonna look at you an' say LOOKIT 'EM SHOES!"

And they did. In Mississippi, when Gwen went home for Spring vacation, people went pale and speechless in the wake of those shoes. And her mother, accusing



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Gwendolyn of having become a whore, threatened to destroy the sandals.

"You a fine howdy do!" her mother told her, tossing the shoes at her. "Chocolate city!" she grumbled.

Gwendolyn told Uncle Charlie first. An intercessor. "The government has picked me to go on a program to Africa. 'Count I got good grades. They gonna pay me all kind a money jes' to write a paper. I get a trip, my credits at school, and a chance for a job I get out. Tell Mamma I buy her a new stove and icebox I get home. It only for three month," she said. "You tell Mamma."

"AFRICA!" she heard her mother roar in the other room, and then the phrases coming in an excited garble " . . . wil' animals . . . heyd huntahs . . . mumbo jumbo . . . too many niggers. . . ." Gwendolyn smiled at Melchior, the two of them down on the floor with an atlas looking for Nigeria.

Gwendolyn packed up to get out of there in a hurry in case Mrs. Johnson got a change of mind. As it was, her mother vacillated, threatening to drown herself or take the gas pipe, or do both to Gwendolyn. She was frightened, she allowed in one of her quieter moments, that Gwendolyn might not come home. Not because her daughter might get hurt—what could be worse than Satan's own Washington?—But because her daughter might just like it there.

"When you walk down the street," she mused, "an' someone there in a car or standin' behin' a tree, or comin' out roun' a corner . . . when a man got his back to you and that man turn 'roun', his face gonna be a black face."

"Yeh, an' all the cops be black," said Uncle Charlie.

"All the doctors, the nurses, the judges, the pilots," said Melchior.

"All the teachers," said Sukie.

"An' telephone operators," said Phyllis.

"Car sellers and car buyers," said Roger.

"Car fixers and car builders," said Benjamin.

Gwendolyn and brothers and sisters danced around the table. They made a party with Cokes and chocolate cakes and a banner saying "Bon Voyage, Gwen baby."

When Gwendolyn arrived in Lagos, Nigeria, a Mrs. Stegler was at the airport to welcome her and drive her to a small flat. She was a slender blonde woman and she smiled and chatted about what life was like in this hectic town. Perhaps Gwendolyn was tired, she suggested, perhaps Gwendolyn would like to rest a day or two. "Jet lag," she called it, a phrase which made Gwendolyn feel like she had just *arrived,* honey, not *lagged.* Gwendolyn Johnson in the jet set. Gwendolyn thanked the lady, plopped down on a couch and expected to sleep. But she was wound up, like the highest high, she was tuning in on all channels, running on all cylinders.

She opened her new red suitcase, pulled out her big blue jeans, her bright green sleeveless turtle neck jersey and her multi-colored four inch platform sandals. Ready for battle on the town. She grabbed a bus in what she reckoned was the right direction, hit what looked like the downtown and wound up in a place called "Dixie Fried Chicken" with a menu right out of Colonel Sanders and a picture of some black dude in a Colonel Sanders outfit smiling out of a kinky beard and saying "Real U.S. fried chicken. Try our crinkle-fry chips and fish burgers." Right there she met her first man, a skinny kid about half her size. He made the proposition and she didn't hesitate. She grabbed the opportunity and took him back to the flat and stayed there with him until the next day.

And then, two nights later, there was the Hausa trader, a tall wiry man, very black but with the features of a white man. He wore a long shirt, a *kanzu* he called it, and an embroidered skull cap. He chewed on kola nut and betel and his fine mouth was tinted a deep red. He smelled of leather and came to her door selling statues and hassocks. She had just had a bath and had tied herself in a robe, pulling the sash tight around her waist. His eyes froze on her breasts when she leaned forward to look at his wares. She made the Hausa shower first and then, still wet, he twisted his long ebony body around her like a snake, his breath perfumed with betel nut. She bought a carving from him, a ripe woman holding out huge breasts over a big belly and carefully etched below, the fine details of her sex. "Like this dude had statues that looked like ME," she wrote in an x-rated letter to Susan B. at Howard.

When Ellie Stegler called Gwendolyn to say, "We would like to have a welcoming get together for you, Gwen," Gwendolyn wanted to say, "Missus, I already *been* welcomed!"

Instead, she said, "Oh, thank you, Mrs. Stegler, I'd really like that." Summer opportunity. The invitation went in her scrap book along with the plane ticket vouchers and the chit from the Dixie Fried Chicken. "Shittin' in the Tall Corn, we say in Mississippi," she muttered, thinking "an' I'm gonna razzle dazzle them with my coon shoes, four big inches up, soaring over the host and hostess sky high."

The reception, your typical honkey do with chamber music muted in the background and scrawny white ladies on diets dwarfed in big African caftans, was a good time after all. Practically all the Nigerian guys, guys who worked in the office, guys who worked in the ministries alongside American technicians, guys who were teachers at American-sponsored colleges, guys who studied in The States, all these guys clustered around Gwendolyn. She was American, rich (so they thought), in transit, so clearly loose, and she was MAGNIFICENT. Before the night was over, she had four dates for the next night. She somehow intended to keep them all.

She ended up going out with the first guy that showed. His name was Adedeji. He took her to dinner. He told her about the couple of years he spent in the States at Yale University, freezing his ass off and pumping gas to get pocket money. He told her about his village in Western State, about his family, his father who had seven wives. "But I'll only have one wife," he told her. He took her to his small flat. He took her to his bed. He told her she was beautiful and sweet. He said it in Yoruba. *O dun. O wu mi.* A language that rose and fell like a song.

She laughed. "Hey, you know back home, I'm just fat Gwendolyn. I tell the jokes."



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"Here you are a goddess," only he isn't joking. He caressed her rich flesh, the mound of her belly. He tasted the thick folds of her neck.

Gwendolyn breaks all her other dates forever. When the Hausa comes, she tells him she doesn't want any tee-hee. When the skinny kid from the Dixie Fried shows up, she doesn't invite him in. She spends all her time with Adedeji. She should be writing her paper, doing her research. Grabbing the opportunity. But she doesn't even go in to the office.

Mrs. Stegler checks in. "Is everything o.k., Gwen? Is there any kind of problem? I don't want to pry, but if I can help . . . because," she starts saying things which sound like they're supposed to make Gwendolyn feel responsible, possibly grateful, as though she were standing there for her whole race and her whole sex. She's using tired old phrases like ". . . times of change . . . black women in demand on the job market of the future . . . a real chance . . . a golden opportunity . . ."

Gwendolyn interrupts, "You don't mind me asking this do you, but, like what are you personally doing about all these movements—all this stuff you're laying on me?"

Ellie Stegler looks kind of embarrassed. "I don't know what I'm doing. I'm sorry. I wish I was your age. I wish I had your chance."

"O.k, o.k. I'll get the work done," Gwen tells her with absolutely no intention of doing a thing.

Adedeji invites her to come home with him to his village for a few days. She agrees, excited. She goes with him dressed in Yoruba duds, a wrapper and a *gele*, the wild turban of Western Nigeria, big as a dream flower opening on the wide African morning. On her platform sandals, she is nearly as tall as he is. He gives her a golden bangle that she knows he can't afford. He takes her picture with his instant camera, twice, giving one print to her and keeping the other for himself. There she is, beaming in Kodakolor or whatever, rainbow Gwendolyn looking for all the world like an authentic, indigenous, Yoruba native.

On the bus, she loosens the wrapper. Air rushes into the folds of the cloth and over her hot moist skin. Adedeji looks cool, used to the heat. People talk in Yoruba to her and she laughs telling them she is American. Maybe she is Yoruba, she tells Adedeji. They buy boxes of yogurt and spicey cakes made of mashed beans, eggs, sardines and hot pepper, steamed in green leaves.

"Just like my mamma said," she tells Adedeji, "I see a little kid behind a bush, a woman bent over her child, a guy resting on his belly in the shade; I see that person there ahead of me standing in the dark shadow of a porch and I don't have to worry or even go close up to see his face. I know he's black. You understand what that means?" Did she really believe it, though? Did her mother really even believe it? That there was safety in color. That no one here would hurt her. She drank the light as it washed over Adedeji's perfect face, modeled in soft curves, his almond eyes set high on his cheekbones, strangely oriental eyes and his skin, not brown like hers but dark, jet black. She wondered if her mother had been right, if she might not just stay here with this man. Why was he taking her to his home? Was it a proposal?

His father's compound—enclosed in high terra cotta walls, clouded in red dust, a path to it over dried mud and rocks. She carries the precious sandals like a wedding bouquet. Inside the old man's wives have their houses, single room houses, huts, neat, grass-covered, clothes drying, hung on bushes and sticks. Kids, so many kids.

Adedeji's mother greets her with a closed sardonic grin. She gestures for her to sit down on an awkward chair, something that angles back in a way that Gwendolyn can't possibly fit her body into. Someone brings a stool and Gwendolyn settles into it. Adedeji tells her that she looks like a queen. People peer from doorless houses, from behind trees. They gather behind her giggling, adolescent girls, cloths held tight over high hard breasts, and boys rushing around while Adedeji heaps presents on them all.

The mother smiles open this time. A tooth is gone.

Gwendolyn smiles back.

Someone brings tea.

The hut they bring her to that night is dark. The bed is iron—a spring on legs and a thin mattress of some dried grass. An earthen jug of water and a plastic cup so old that dirt is imbedded in it are there on an unsteady table. One of the young girls comes in with a lantern, a bowl of rice and a spoon. The rice has some oily leaves and a few pieces of yellow meat on top of it. The girl stares at Gwendolyn with distrust, moving around her at the same distance. She pours out some water, and backs out of the hut. Gwendolyn cannot eat that stuff. She takes some papers out and tries to work. She gets out her novel, a mystery by Alistair MacLean. The lantern is too weak. She tries to drink some of the water but it's slimy and tastes of clay. The sheet on her bed is rough, washed in strong chemicals. The room smells of acid and insect spray. Gwendolyn had expected Adedeji would be there. She stretches out on the bed and waits.

In the morning Adedeji comes and tells her that he had to spend the night with his father and some friends in a nearby compound. "Gentlemen affairs," he says. "I will come to you tonight," he says, "but today I have more things to do. I own a few farms around here. Everyone will look after you."

He leaves her. His mothers and sisters (or whoever the hell they all are) try to involve her in their work but she understands nothing of what is going on. One girl, a sister?, hovers around her more than the others with an intense sort of curiosity that Gwendolyn knows is jealousy. The girl is tall and lean from hard work. She has deep brown skin and her hair is plaited in corn rows to the nape of her long neck where it makes a delicate fringe. Her eyes, like Adedeji's are ovals slanted back over high cheekbones. Her shoulders and back are narrow, angled down to a slender waist where her body curves out to a woman's hips and long dancer's legs.

After a long pantomime, it becomes clear that she wants to see Gwendolyn carry something on her head in the manner of a Yoruba woman. Gwendolyn removes her sandals to give it a try. She becomes the center of interest, her great clumsy body swaying, her neck too weak, her hair a high pillow on which nothing will sit. The girl gestures, offering to plait Gwendolyn's hair.



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The American's hair is soft and the African girl makes a high surprised sound when she touches it, calling the others over to feel it. They all come shyly with tentative fingers, giggling when they contact it and then running away with excited cries. The girl braids Gwendolyn's hair, standing back to admire her handiwork and then admiring Gwendolyn with awe. Finally she dares to poke the flesh around Gwendolyn's neck and presses a palm on the woman's large breast, smiling and nodding in approval and envy.

Gwendolyn tries the basket on her head again. They teach her the words: *Wa gbe ru mi.* Come put it on my head. Funny nasal syllables. She laughs now, tipping nearly over and looking, she thinks, like a token in some Walt Disney film. The girl meanwhile has taken Gwendolyn's mighty shoes and is walking around on them, or trying to, as unsteadily as Gwendolyn with the basket of pineapples on her head. Everyone is laughing. A small boy rushes in and pushes over the girl. She falls on Gwendolyn and the two of them crumble in a heap of dust, giggling like little kids.

The girl shows Gwendolyn some onions. Teaches her to say it, *Alubosa.* Makes it clear that Gwendolyn is supposed to cut these onions into slices and put them in this pot. The girl has a fire going and is boiling up some yam and some goat meat. Gwendolyn is frying the onions in red palm oil while her friend is tossing in hot peppers and demonstrating what they are going to do to Gwendolyn's mouth when she tastes them.

Then suddenly the girl grabs Gwendolyn's arm. "Adedeji!" she announces, smiling and nodding. The man steps through the gate and comes across the red compound. Huge. His shoulders are wide and the cloth of his huge robe has golden threads woven into it, embroidered at the neck with spiraling gold symbols. He seems to float, shimmering in the red sun, glistening in the dusk.

"Is she your wife?" Gwendolyn asks him that night. He sits in her dark hut fingering the lantern.

"Yes," he says.

"What did you bring me here for then, huh?" she asks.

"I wanted you to see my home, my family—"

"Your *wife*?"

"Not necessarily that, but you're American, black, I thought the village . . . the . . ."

"You were with her last night? Tonight me?"

"Look," he said, "it isn't that way here. You're using some ideas you bring from America. It's different in Africa."

"You think she doesn't know?"

"She knows. Of course she knows."

"You think she doesn't care?"

"That's another matter. It hasn't any relevance though. Besides, she's lucky. She knows I only plan to have one wife. She won't have to face—all this. My mother hated being the third wife. The first wife hates her. My wife won't have that."

"Oh jee-sus, and when do you like PLAN to get her out of ALL THIS? When do you take her to Lagos so you can't mess around? What's the difference between you and your old man is what I want to know? Except you're cheap. And I ain't about to be your second wife, you bastard," she says. "So get your black ass out of here."

She dusts her multicolored sandals, ties the heel straps together with a little bow she digs out of her purse and takes them to Adedeji's wife. The young woman is hunkered alone by her fire stirring the soup she and Gwendolyn had made so happily that afternoon. Her feet are cracked and caked with ashes; ashes streak her face. (Had there been tears?)

Gwendolyn hands her the shoes. She doesn't understand at first but gets the picture and brightens. She dusts off her sorry looking feet and puts the glorious sandals on, towering and strutting and smiling at Gwendolyn.

"Lookit 'em shoes!" Gwendolyn sings.

After that it wasn't so hard for Gwendolyn to get her work done. She swore off men. Mrs. Stegler got excited and helped the kid with some of the fine grammatical points of her paper and Gwendolyn, the scholar-nun, turned the thing into something she knew she was going to fly with. Title: "Cottage Industries in Polygamous Yoruba Households." Thesis: That Yoruba women produced all the goods and ran all the businesses in rural areas of Western Nigeria and that any development efforts in that area should be focused on them and not their menfolk. She gave the paper in Washington at a World Bank seminar on Women in Development and was awarded a scholarship to attend courses at the Hague.

When she got home to Mississippi, her mother was in despair. Melchior was going to Boston, to that citadel of honkeydom, Harvard University ("I cain't even pronounc't it," she said.) on a very big scholarship. She was sure they would turn him into a cracker or one of them fancy niggers who marries white gals. When Gwendolyn muttered something about Holland, it seemed to be the end of everything. Mrs. Johnson shrieked, "Ain't NO black folks in Holland. None!" She was standing there ironing Melchior's shirts to absolute perfection and she had sunk every penny she had into a new wardrobe for that boy.

"I bought you a new stove, Mamma, and icebox," Gwendolyn said. But the woman was not talking.

Everyone stood around then and Gwendolyn started digging out the presents. Bright cloths, Afro combs, beads, a couple of batiks to hang on the walls, carvings of people who looked like them and a little black hand-sewn doll for her baby sister Louise who was already talking up a storm.

In the rubble of the unpacked things, this little Louise finds a picture of her sister in Yoruba duds and stands there looking and holding the thing for awhile.

"Dat you, Gwind'lin!!!" she finally says. The little girl gives a funny laugh like someone who is already used to trick photography, and then off the track says, "Hey Gwind'lin, you gonna give me them bes' shoes I grows up? You gonna give me them hi' hi' shoes?"

"I don't have them shoes nomore," Gwendolyn tells her, "I already give them to someone over Africa. Someone who didn't have no shoes atall."

"It far 'way, ain't it?" says the little kid. "Someplace far 'way like Mamma say?"

"Jest 'bout as far 'way as you can git." □


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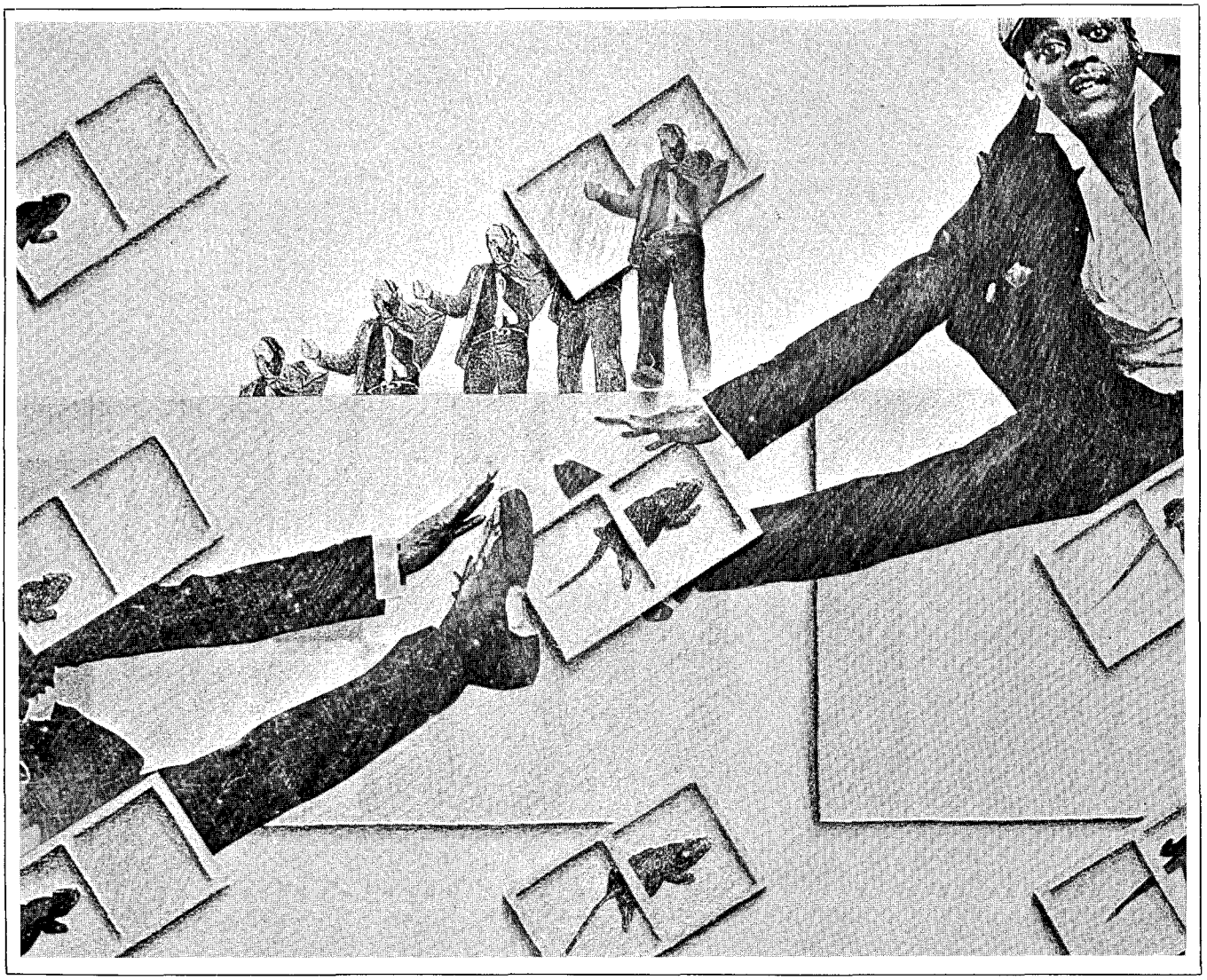
# Stephen Dixon

# STOP



A car stopped. Man got out. "You there," he said. I dropped my package and started running. "Hey wait, where you running to?" He knew. He knew I knew. Car stopping, man getting out, motor still running, driver inside with his hands on the wheel, car door left open so the man outside could jump right back in. And his look. If I could see the driver's face, probably both their looks. But I didn't have the time to explain or speculate on all this. Just continued running.

The car caught up with me a block later. They drove alongside for a few seconds, pointing and talking about how good a runner I was, seeming to enjoy a joke, for they both broke up. Then they parked about 15 feet in front of me. I stopped. Both men got out. Motor still on, doors left open. "You there," same man from before said, approaching me, driver staying behind. "We only want to speak to you about something, so what's the rush?"

Standing in the middle of an intersection I had 4 ways to go. Back, to them, either sidestreet. Back they probably had another car coming by now. Left sidestreet ended in a school ballfield with a chain fence around it with the exits at the other side of it sometimes locked. Right sidestreet I'd never been on before and ran down it. "Oh for godsakes," the driver said, "do you have to? We just ate." They got in the car. Drove slowly behind me. Then accelerated past and made a sharp turn onto the sidewalk right in front of me, cutting me off. I couldn't stop in time

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and slammed into the car door, went down, got up, legs gave and I fell down again. The man in the right seat seemed shaken too.

"Did you have to stop so fast?" he said to the driver.

"I didn't want to be chasing him all day. Anyway, I immobilized him."

I jumped up. Both doors opened. I was stuck between the right car door and front of the car. Two possible ways out for me were to quickly crawl across the car's front seat, which might fool them, but then the driver shut his door, or run into the building.

"Now please, just a little minute of your precious time," the driver said, climbing over the front fender to get to me. Other man was a couple of steps away from being in arm's reach. I ran down the steps and pushed past the vestibule door. Door to the hallway inside was locked. "Hold up already," the driver said. "My stomach, my feet." I rang all the building's bells. The men started down the steps. I braced one hand against the hallway door and foot against the vestibule door so the men couldn't get in. A woman on the intercom said, "Yes?"

"Let me in."

"Who is it?"

"Just let me in please. It's an emergency."

"Not until I know who it is."

"Police. There's a man we're after who just ran into your building and we want to get in without breaking down your door."

"That's still not saying who it is." The men were trying to push their way in. "I need proof. For this building, in this neighborhood, you have to."

"Look out your window. That's our doubleparked car on your sidewalk. Now would we park like that if we weren't after what I say?"

"I have the back view."

I rang all the bells, kept my hand and foot braced against the doors. The men were caving in my foot. I kept ringing the bells with my free hand. The woman kept saying who is it, she needs proof, will I please stop ringing if I can't give it as she's old, too lame to be walking back and forth like this, till she or someone else let me in. The driver threw open their door and rushed to get to the hallway door with the man behind him practically falling on top of him, but I got it shut. The other man got up and rang the bells. I ran to the back of the first floor looking for a rear entrance. There was none. I ran upstairs. The men were in the vestibule. "Yes, police," the driver yelled into the intercom. "Precinct 17, ma'am. Officer Aimily. Your local patrolman's Grenauer or Pace. Pace then. But we're after a man who just came in your building. That's our car outside." Someone rang them in.

"There a back entrance?" he said to the other man.

"No, all the buildings on this side face the river."

"What do you mean—right on it? I thought we were a block away."

"Flush up against. Absolutely. From some of the back flats here you think you're floating in the sea."

They started upstairs.

"The roof," the driver said.

"Oh damn, I forgot. They're connected."

"You stay on the street, I'll follow him."

"But your stomach. And you said your feet."

"I'll live. Call in for more. He comes out, grab him. Bat him to the ground if he won't stop. I've had enough."

The driver continued upstairs. I knocked on the rear doors as I went up. The roof was out of the question. Unless someone was working up there or sunbathing in this cold. For all the roof doors were locked from the outside in. Once up there you have to keep the door open with something to get back in. Way it was with my own building and all the roofs I'd been on in this neighborhood and by fire law all the roofs in the city. But if someone in one of the rear apartments opened up I could run past him, throw open a back window and jump out and try and swim away. I'd jump from 2 stories up at the most. That would be about 3 to 4 stories up because there must be a floor or 2 at least between the ground floor and water. The fourth floor was a little too high to jump from though I might give it a try if I really felt lucky. But from the fifth floor I don't think I'd be able to survive.

Nobody on the third floor rear opened. The driver was panting as he climbed the stairs. I had youth on him, energy, not as much fat, no recent meal in me if what he'd said was true and no ruse, not that any of that would help me much unless of course I jumped and swam. Nobody on the fourth floor answered my door pounding either and I climbed the last 2 flights and unbolted the door to the roof.

No stick around or anything like that to wedge under the doorknob to keep the door closed. Now the driver was climbing the last flight. "Boy," he said, resting halfway up and seeing me looking down on him, "you're the biggest pain I've had all week. I could throw you off that roof—I'm not kidding. Just throw you off without thinking about it much for what you're putting me through."

I looked around. "Anybody on one of the roofs here? Hey, do you hear me, anybody around?" Nobody answered and I couldn't see anyone. I ran to the next roof. The roofs went on for an entire block. The last roof looked down on the street I'd just run on, avenue I'd first seen those men and run along to get to this street, river on its third side. The man stepped out on the roof, put a brick he found outside between the door and jamb so the door wouldn't close all the way. I ran to the last building, hurdling the dozen or so 2-foot high parapets separating each roof.

He followed me, climbing over each parapet very carefully so he wouldn't have to dirty his pants legs and shirt cuffs. "Don't make it so tough for me anymore," he yelled from 5 roofs away. "Meet me at some halfway point from here. Or if you want, I'll go back to that door I came out of and you can meet me there."

"I don't know what you want," I yelled back, "so why you keep coming after me?"

"You don't know, then why were you so quick to run then?" from 3 roofs away.

"I see 2 big men chasing me, I run, wouldn't you?"

"We didn't chase. We walked. We drove. We said where's the rush? We were very polite and showed no harm. You smacked into our car, we didn't to you. But let's talk about it all downstairs. It's filthy up here and the air stinks from the incinerators and exhaust chutes."



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He was on the last roof with me. I tried to open the door. Locked. What a fool I was not to have tried the doors on all the roofs I just ran across. They were all probably locked but I shouldn't have been so sure. Though even if I had got in one of them, probably nobody in the fourth or third floor rear apartments in that building would have opened up for me and there was still that other man on the street and by now probably a couple more. I looked over the roof into the street.

"Don't jump. You say you don't know what we're after you for, maybe you're right."

"Who's jumping?" There were plenty of men down there, most looking up, and double- and triple-parked cars. The street had been blocked off.

The man on the roof came up to within 10 feet of me. "How about it now?"

He was getting his wind back but maybe I could run around him. Left or right, where did I have the most room to get by him? when a man came out of the door he'd left open with that brick before and then other men from several more. I ran to the roof side overlooking the river. A liner was out there. *Olympia* it said. Ocean liner. Going for a cruise. All white. People on it outside, probably with drinks in their hands and bundled up in warm coats and furs. It must have just set off. Tugs at both ends of it but now peeling away from the liner so it was probably now starting to get out of the harbor on its own. I waved to it. Took off my sweater and waved that to it. A yellow sweater. Probably could be easily seen. Someone waved back to me. Now people were. Several, more. I was sure it was me they were waving at, probably some with binoculars looking at me too. I waved harder at them and yelled "Hey, hey, have fun, great journey," even if I knew they couldn't hear me from where I was. Then a whole long railing of them at the bow were waving and then another railingful at the back and it seemed people from the other side of the ship were coming to this side to wave too. They were happy to wave to someone at the start of their trip, even if it was maybe only for a week south to the isles. I know I'd be.

"You're not going to be rushing me and doing anything silly with that sweater now?" the man said. He stayed where he was but the closest of those other men was now only a roof away.

"I wouldn't," I said, still waving. "I don't want to hurt anyone and most of all not myself when I know I didn't do anything wrong."

"Then let me put these on you and you'll come along. Because really, I'm getting more mad at you all the time."

"Granted." I put out my wrists. He handcuffed them. The closest man was almost right behind him now. I broke away and jumped over the roof on the river side, my hand still holding the sweater which trailed above me.

That should have done it but they already had a couple of launches below to pick me up. Biggest surprise though was popping out of the water alive. All it took for them was a long pole with a hook at the end of it which they got around the chain of my cuffs. They dragged me in, lifted me out of the water gently and rolled me over on my belly on the deck and 2 men sat on opposite ends of me as if I was a very dangerous but prize rare whale. □

DEBORA GREGER

## A MOMENT'S ARCHITECTURE

1

While a gardener unrolled waves
of sod, in the beginnings of a house

a man, having floated a cloth on a makeshift
table, anchored it with silver and china.

Another time he brought a woman, hooked
her picture hat on a nail, and,

eyes almost closed, stepped back
against the one light, a dangling bulb

that arced an erratic search.
He drew her to the floorboards.

A fog unfurled sails in the rafters.

2

For the first day in months I'm outside
without a coat. Down the street

petals spume over a skeletal house
onto levelled dirt. Incongruent

with anything but itself, the skinned
frame cuts air into rooms

wind for now can ignore.
What's left of the orchard's adrift

in its blooms. This must be what
the Chinese poet meant by spring snow

—something so out of place it
stands like a metaphor, threshold

of a house just inside the one you see,
a room where someone sets a table,

a handful of cutlery signalling sunlight.



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# JANE NUDELMAN

# A VISIT TO FRIENDS IN THE COUNTRY, ELEVATION 4,600 FEET

*First Impressions.* The day we get to the ranch, someone finds a black widow spider in the outhouse. They kill the female and later on find the male and the egg sack underneath the seat and destroy them, too.

It is October. The meadow grass is golden in the day and pale white in the evening. The pigs have been slaughtered and smoked and Nathan, the three-year-old, has seen them die. But the day we arrive, he goes to the barn looking for them, expecting to find them safe in their pen. It does not seem unreasonable to Nathan that the pigs should be dead and then alive again. The adults make urgent explanations, but Nathan is stubborn and, finally, must be carried back to the cabin, crying.

*In the tipi.* "A tipi is a perfect dwelling," our friends tell us. This tipi is twenty feet high. Its floor is made of



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worn-through oriental rugs and denim-covered mats. We are sitting in a circle around the fire and on the white, slanting walls our looming shadows dance. The fire burns hot and almost all the sharp smoke goes out through the smoke hole and into the clear night. If we were to station ourselves across the sloping meadow and look down at the tipi, we would see it glow against the black backing of the pines. If people inside the tipi were to move around, we would see their dark shadows stretch and shrink against the firelit sides.

Our friends are preoccupied with diet and with health. They have put together a clinic for the town and without irony have made available there an alpha-wave machine, two midwives, an acupuncturist, an itinerant psychic healer, a Shiatsu masseuse, a Rolfer, and, when he turns up in the area, an Indian medicine man. All that the new clinic lacks is a doctor. John, my husband, is finishing his medical residency. Our friends hope that John and I will be enchanted by the mountains.

We fall asleep in the tipi and are awakened much later by the human-sounding cries of coyotes.

*In the garden.* This is the quietest place. Huge, blue-green cabbages, leaves rough and ruffled and enfolding one another to form a great flower, grow amidst the remains of the summer garden. I have always puzzled over the tales about babies found in cabbages, picturing those pale, compressed supermarket cabbages—how could one of those contain a baby? Now I recognize the real cabbage—such abundant and protective leaves—a baby could be concealed easily in one of these.

I am wearing jeans and heavy socks, work boots and several layers of shirts with a black and red wool checkered one on top. I am reading under the apple tree. I am foiling a prophecy.

The prophet, a refugee second-cousin, a wholesale button salesman whose brilliant prospects were ruined by the Nazis. "Ah!" he said, with narrow malice, at my wedding, "so! Frau Herr Doktor—with the little diamond earrings!" And his tortured exclamation engulfed me in a caricature of expectations, sent me shapeless down the dark domestic corridor, a doctor's wife, to cry out "Coming!" to an anxious bell.

The bees in the garden are steady workers and their hum surrounds me. I can't tell what I have read, but it is entirely pleasant to feel the slightly roughened pages as I turn them.

*At the creek.* With fishing gear, two apples in a day pack, John and I set out for the trout-rich creek far below. The narrow trail runs through the forest and then up and along the side of a proud ridge. After several miles stalking single file along the ridge, we slide heels first, aslant, down the mountainside until we reach the creek.

In this dry year, the water runs low. We will need to take special care to stay out of sight of watchful fish who can, sliding secretly out of shadows, see us and spook downstream, spooking the fish in the next stream and the next, leaving us helpless behind them, slipping on bright boulders, drenching our boots in the low water.

John and I clamber downstream separately. He stops to fish in likely-looking pools. I forge ahead. I see but one fish: gliding out from beneath brown leaves fallen and floating on the surface of the water, gliding sideways out of a dark pool when I do not expect him, he slides watchfully out and hovers, looking long at me, flickering like the shadow of a flame, before he disappears. He leaves me feeling breathless, known. I stretch out on the bank to wait for John and think how, if we should try to make love here, the sharp stones and pebbles would dig into my spine. How, if we should roll over in passion, we would be caught on the thorny scrub.

John catches up, irritated by the difficulty of the fishing. We rest, eat the apples, drink from the stream, begin to think of finding our way back. The ground on either side of the slow-falling stream is too steep to climb, and we decide to continue downstream until we find a way to cut up to the trail.

We find it at last, a dry creekbed, overgrown with brush and filled with boulders, that winds up the mountainside slightly less steeply than the deer trails. We will climb up the boulders to the top of the ridge, hoping this dried-out creek will there rejoin the trail.

Half-way up, I have to rest, and sit crosslegged on a huge rock. John climbs further, scrambling angrily over rock after rock, wearing the new and bright-green pack. I lose the sound and then the sight of him and sit by myself in the silence. I am afraid there will be an earthquake: alone now in this rocky canyon, I imagine being crushed by boulders tumbling from above. I imagine the thunder of falling rock, the shriek of a small bird flying upward.

John, very small, waves to me from far above. "I've found the trail," he calls.

*In the bath.* Into a short, oval, galvanized tub we run water, heated in the afternoon sun in lengths of black pipe strung out on the meadow. The grasses are dry and pale, pale as the white hair of the child chasing chickens down the hill in front of the cabin, wheeling and spinning near the hollow-log water trough.

Our bodies, which are pale and shameful in the city, have luster in the midday light. We are neither too greatly covered with hair nor too little. We are, here, neither too thin nor too fat. We seem exactly the right color and texture. We are luminous, surrounded by grasses, by mountains, by the blue sky and the shadowy forest.

Kneeling in front of John, I spread out a towel and lie down in the sun, weak sun in late October, to watch him bathe.

*In the cabin.* That night, we sleep by ourselves in the cabin. I am afraid of a fire and do not let John light the woodstove. I open up all the windows. The sky is clear and quivering, bright with stars.

In the middle of the night, we are awakened by a noise, a scuffling noise, upstairs. Turning over heavily, I say, "It must be the cat; that black one." John is wide awake, alarmed, imagining things. He puts on his pants

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and picks up a large knife. He starts up the unbannistered stairs. I feel myself being drawn away and wonder, as I go back to sleep, if John will fall on the knife.

In the morning he says, "It was the cat."

*In town.* Alan drives to town for the mail. "Gold," he says when he gets back. "Big nuggets found upriver a few days ago. Must by fifty people in the river now. With portable dredges. The whole town watching. Come on."

The town, which embraces three hundred people and nearly as many streetwise dogs, nestles in a small valley. One fork of a pure river, sluggish and low in the drought, runs through it. Half of the town is on one side of the river; the other half across from it. A small, graceful bridge connects the two. As we approach, we can see people in and about the river.

We park near the overflowing small cafe, pass oldtimers sitting eagerly on wooden sidewalk benches, wearing suspenders, caps. Their work-flattened fingers flutter atop canes; their small eyes shine. We nod to them. "Hey!" one calls to us, "now the miners is here, we waitin' on the hookers!"

Men are working in the river, most of them wearing wetsuits and masks, but the small dredges are silent. "Sheriff shut them down," a kid informs us. "Too damn much noise."

An undersheriff, in uniform, carrying a gun, stands near us. His full face seems sleepy. He does not take his eyes off the river. "Last time they had excitement like this," he remarks, "was when they hung the Mexican woman from yonder bridge. Year 1852."

*In the kitchen.* Laurel and Iris tell me about their trip to Calistoga, to the hot mineral waters and the homeopath. We are sitting around the oak table drinking coffee. Abundant ferns hang overhead; a golden slant of midday sun filters through a dusty window. Catalogs, from which to order goods of every sort, lie open on the table. The silverware stands ready in an earthen jug.

At Calistoga, there are healing waters and beneficial muds. Laurel's friend is a student of massage and works there. She wraps up the old ladies and readies them for treatments. "They have no pubic hair, some of them," Laurel says, "none at all."

I could not have anticipated my sadness. The loss of pubic hair never has occurred to me, and I am distracted for the rest of the day by the unreckoned possibilities for loss.

*In the tipi.* Leaf-dappled, I am lying on cloth-covered pads, on worn rugs; ashes, feathery and white, are cooling in the firepit. I can hear the chainsaw whining in the distance. John and the other men have gone for wood. The women have dispersed.

I drowse in the leaf-patterned tipi. Stretched lonely and contented, singular, on this mat, dreaming of sex in the solitary moment.

We have copulated in arrogance and in pleasure, but we have not conceived a child. Maybe things are different in the country.

I sleep on and off until, at dusk, I hear the Jeep straining on the upper road, groaning like some beast beneath the heavy load of wood.

*In the barn.* Even at noon in this back corner of the barn, beneath hanging lines of unused harness, it is dim. A leathery corner, everything back here reeks of age and of neglect. Everything, except for Laurel's coffin. This is newly made, of fragrant pine, set up on saw horses. Laurel was the one who wanted it, so they call it Laurel's coffin. And I have come down to the barn alone, past the cages of quivering rabbits, to lie down in it.

Outside the red hens peck and scatter mindlessly, and the vulture-headed turkeys march about, holding close in a panicky group. Nimble Nathan waltzes with the half-grown goat.

The barn is musty and damp, moldering and rotting, harboring mice and endless crafty generations of spiders. But the pine boards of Laurel's coffin are pale, unweathered, raw, and new, and I look around for some old stool or bench so I can climb up into it and lie down.

*In the cabin.* We spend our last morning in the cabin, reading. It is hazy out and warm, and with the door swung open, we can hear the rap of acorns falling on brown leaves. At noon, our friends come to say goodbye, and we sit outside together.

An oldtimer, a friend of theirs, carrying a fishing pole, is cutting across the meadow on his way down to the creek. He veers toward us, fumbling in his back pocket and taking out the folded-up sheet of the local paper. "Lookyhere," he calls hoarsely, wearing the triumphant and abashed expression of someone who has predicted a catastrophe. We all shift to see the paper. Walt Disney Corp., it says, wants to build a billion-dollar recreational area in the neighboring valley.

Oldtimer shoves the paper into the pocket of his jeans, hobbles off. "Disney in the valley," he grumbles as he moves toward the ragged brush at the edge of the forest. "Indians and chinamen over to the clinic. Gold fever in the town. A lot of damn foolishness, if you ask me."

*Coming down.* Sierra County, Nevada County, Yuba County. We drive down, winding around and twice crossing the low-running river. I deflate slowly, a balloon leaking life. John drives faster than he needs to. He whistles, buoyed it seems by the thickening landscape, by the increasing evidence of civilization and disorder.

"Maybe we'll get home in time to play some tennis," John says, fiddling with the radio.

He is in a hurry to get home, hoping for a set of tennis. I can imagine the optic yellow balls spinning and rising as the last disconsolate toddler is carried away from the playground that adjoins the courts, as dusk falls quickly, like a first-act curtain,

John will want to play, I know, until it is too dark to see, until we cannot judge the speed of our volleys or their depth. John will want to keep playing long after it is possible to be sure about anything except the most general position of the ball or to see anything clearly except the glowing, white, painted lines that mark the outer limits of the court. □



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ARTHUR SMITH

# SUMMONED: A BAPTISM

What I remember is a mirror-fronted tank
from which, on Sunday evenings, the dead rose
awkwardly, pinned in their long white robes
that flowed like pleated marble. After the last,
the side windows of the hall were turned out,
and the summer evening air, lifting, loaded
with cut timothy and the pink wash of sky,
came through easily and almost sweetly,
as though melons had been sliced open outdoors
and the cool meat laid, sugary, on the concrete.

If the spirit failed to take, that first time,
back into the warm water we went. I went once
because I lied. She had looked, hard, and cracked
me on the temple, hard, the failure of the flesh,
even for love, in her sight ugly. The dull pain
stayed, though her eyes and the room, my room,
went small and bright. This woman, with my mother's
face and hands, glared at the ceiling as though
beyond, at God, and then while she cried, again
struck me. The pain, I said, and still say, stayed.

My mother's dream, returning as though summoned,
wakes her in a pale light. The laying on of hands
has done no good. She calls me to the bed,
resigned, no longer expecting to be released,
and tells me someone has been singled out,
someone, like myself—she can't say who—
laid out on a kitchen table, covered with a sheet.
She enters, and the room is grey. An oil lamp
hangs above the body. This, she says, is a sign
someone is about to join the dead. She can't say who.

All of us, good news, were saved, which is
to say we must have suffered, at a critical time,
a low-grade fever, with none more heated than
the one that brought me to my knees in front
of an oak dresser, mirrored, into which I could
not look, the words, like any words frequently
repeated, a warm, hushed babble in my throat.
If suffering, like any fire, was its own reward,
then we were all in love, returning to that tank
repeatedly, burning, and out of breath, burning.



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# A Gift of Mirrors:
# An Essay in Psychologic Evolution

by William F. Fry, Jr.

Contemporary life is reflected in so many millions of mirrors all about us that it is a real challenge to imagine a time when humans were not confronted repeatedly with mirror images of themselves. However, there was such a time, and not so long ago.

Recently, I made pilgrimage to the Museo Archeologico in Florence (Italy). In this huge, dusty jumble-bin of antiquities is a surprising corner of one room, where a hundred or so hand-mirrors give mute testimony to the sophisticated level attained by Etruscan culture (1000-500 B.C.). These small, tarnished, dull and barely reflective metal disks were obviously treasured by their long-gone owners; they were decorated artistically on the non-reflective side, were fitted with ornamental handles, often with religious or mythologic themes. Representing outstanding technical advance for the age, they were nevertheless barely adequate by our modern standards. They were prized ratities in the broader context of an entire ancient society, owned by favored fortunates. Hardly a comparison can be made with the multitude of mirrored surfaces on every hand throughout our contemporary cultures.

It was not until many centuries later when a commercial glass mirror factory was established in Murano, Italy—during the middle of the 16th century—that mirrors became available for more popular distribution. Even with that technical advance, ownership of mirrors remained a relatively costly luxury. They were regarded as art objects, rather than as cosmetic appliances. Eighteenth century mirrors adorning the walls of several rooms of the Villa Pisani on Italy's Brenta Canal reflect that luxury. Enthusiasm for ownership of glass mirrors, certainly far superior technically to those made of metal, was so great that the Murano/Venice monopoly was soon broken. Better techniques of production were devised; mirrors in ever larger numbers began to be found in more and more parts of the world. The invention of plate glass casting, during the late 1600s, and the invention of silver backing for mirrors, in the 1830s, provided technologic advances which finally made mass production and mass use of mirrors possible for our contemporary age.

Reflecting instruments have fascinated humans for centuries. Evidence of mirror production exists in most ancient cultures with established technologies, and even some without. Stone and metal mirror artifacts have survived from early civilizations of the entire Mediterranean basin, the Anatolian expanse, the lands of the Indus peoples, the Far East. Jade and iron mirrors have been found in sites of Pre-Columbian New World civilizations, including the Olmec horizon dating prior to 1000 B.C. Even for those cultures where mirror technology was beyond the capabilities of the native population, mirrors were popular trade items—as witness the mirror trade carried out by the Romans with Celtic and Germanic tribes of Northern Europe.

The degree of fascination with mirrors is testified to not only by their long and widespread use, but also by the persistence of human ingenuity at finding substances which can be turned to reflective function. Stone surfaces have been polished, especially jade and obsidian. Mirrors have been created of burnished iron ore, native copper, silver, gold, bronze, steel, and of course glass—which has been variously coated with tin, tin/mercury amalgam, tin/antimony amalgam, and silver. That mirrors are especially prized is suggested by the extensive and elaborate decorations applied to them, and by the decorative uses made of them. Rather like worshipful offerings to the gods, mirrors have received lavish attention: inscriptions on their non-reflective surfaces of artistic designs and pictures, beautiful handles and stands and mountings, decoration with inlays of precious metals and gem stones. Several crafts grew up around this urge to decorate and honor mirrors. A large group of enthusiasts collects unusual mirrors. An esoterica of mirrors exists.

In various historic periods, in various cultures, mirrors were at the center of traditions and mythologies. Mirrors were ritual objects in ceremonial burials of ancient China, the Olmec culture, Dynastic Egypt, Etruscan and Scythian and Viking and Indian cultures. In China, the mirrors accompanying the buried corpse were provided to protect the heart of the departing spirit. Some mirrors were spoken of as 'cosmic mirrors' and were believed to be mystically related to heavenly bodies controlling the continuously-rolling cycles of life and death and directing human destiny. Other ceremonial roles for mirrors have included their use in religious rites and state events, their catalytic force in love affairs, their function as ransom or bribe, their representation of economic status or power, their roles in social manners, their use in entertainment—including distorting mirrors.

Throughout the ages many emotionally charged beliefs and superstitions have centered on mirrors. They have been considered to have great power for good, for protection of life, for good luck and good health, for success in love. Mirrors have been hung over dwelling entrances to prevent entry of evil, and they have been used to exorcise devils and vampires and other spirits. The mirroring surface of his shield was Perseus's key to resolution of the horror of Medusa. Mirrors have been used for divination and medical diagnosis, in the belief that a mirror can reflect the inner state of the body. In contemporary times, it is proverbial that mirrors must be cherished; breaking one brings seven years bad luck.

Mirrors have also been seen as dangerous and potentially harmful. Worldwide myths warn of the hazard of having one's soul stolen by a mirror—thus in many parts of the world mirrors are covered when someone is ill in a household. If death has occurred, mirrors are not uncovered until after the funeral. (This superstition is paral-

WILLIAM F. FRY, JR., is a psychiatrist-author who practices and writes in Menlo Park, California. His most recent book, Make 'Em Laugh, was published (Science and Behavior Books) in 1976.



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# A Gift of Mirrors: An Essay in Psychologic Evolution by William F. Fry, Jr.

Contemporary life is reflected in so many millions of mirrors all about us that it is a real challenge to imagine a time when humans were not confronted repeatedly with mirror images of themselves. However, there was such a time, and not so long ago.

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leled by the reaction of many primitive people to having their images captured photographically.)

And fascination with mirrors is not restricted to mankind. Psychologist Gordon Gallup conducted a study of primate behavior in confrontation with mirrors. Wildborn, mirror-naïve chimpanzees initially reacted toward a mirror with social behavior, as if in the presence of another ape. Within three days of mirror exposure, they began to deal with the mirror as a tool in self-directed behavior. This use was manifested in recurrent body grooming and inspection with the help of the mirror. Gallup introduced an experimental protocol by applying dye marks to the chimpanzees' faces while they slept. When mirrors were provided for facial inspection, the chimps were strongly attentive to the dye marks, mirror-inspecting significantly more than previously. Further, they repeatedly inspected, visually and by smell, the fingers with which they had touched the dye marks while watching themselves in the mirror. These behaviors did not occur when macaque Rhesus monkeys were similarly tested; the results were interpreted as indicating a capacity in chimpanzees for development of a concept of self.

## *THE SELF AND EGO PSYCHOLOGY*

A revolution in psychological theorizing occurred during the 1930s and '40s. At first hardly perceived, as is the case in so much psychologic evolution, the changed viewpoint was first apparent only in relatively obscure writings of a scattered few psychology professionals—Heinz Hartmann, Anna Freud, W.R.D. Fairbairn. This revolution resulted in a transformation of the human view of the human psyche, particularly as regards the structure and function of the Ego.

Traditional Freudian psychology—which of course had been a revolutionary increment of psychologic evolution in its own day—assigned a secondary role to the Ego, as arbiter in psychological conflicts between Id, Superego and reality. The newly transformed model presents the Ego as having an integrity of its own and as being the focal entity under which are subsumed all the natural endowments and competences of the human organism. This has become known as the 'executive' function of the Ego and is considered integrated with the traditional 'synthesizing' portion.

Such theorists as Erik Erikson, Abraham Maslow, Karen Horney, Alfred Adler, Carl Rogers, and, more lately, Margaret Mahler and Rene Spitz and Heinz Kohut and Jean Lacan: these and others have subsequently enlarged and extended the recognition of Ego psychology. Now we find the focus of attention broadened to consideration of the Self, of which the Ego is described as a major component. Emerged in importance has become the *self-image*, formulated to encompass conscious and unconscious self-perception. And of the self-image, the *body-image* is considered a crucial portion. Leopold Bellak (1964) wrote, "An important aspect of the sense of self is the image one has of one's body." And Seymour Fisher (1974) commented, "We live within the confines of a body image or body concept that functions to structure and give stability to our psychological world. Our body perceptions constitute a core of self-definition and provide the compass points for self-orientation."

During the past 25 years, body-image facets of Ego psychology have stimulated numerous theoretical and laboratory investigations. A large number of clinical studies have explored pathologies related to body-image aberrations in personality development. Several attempts have been made to utilize body-image techniques in psychologic treatment. Specifically, the therapeutic discipline of biofeedback depends heavily on body-image concepts in both theoretical foundations and clinical usage. Body-image concepts are an important part of psychotherapeutic interventions in treatment of schizophrenia, and have valuable roles in the play therapy commonly used in treatment of emotionally disturbed children.

## *MIRRORS AND EGO DEVELOPMENT*

While contemplating from distant perspective the inclusive issue of Ego development, Self, self-image, body-image, we see emerge a structure rather like the childhood-cherished Chinese boxes toy. It is clear that self-image concepts depend upon the prior establishment of images of Self within the theoreticians who formulated the concepts; they could know only what they know. In other words, the steps in human psychologic evolution represented by these steps in human understanding are reflections of the levels of self-understanding achieved first within those persons presenting the theory, and secondly within those who grasp and understand what is presented.

The same can be said about body-image concepts. If, as theory argues, a certain level of Ego development is necessary before body-image can be recognized, the body-image theoreticians must have attained at least that level of Ego development. Remembering the mirror experiments with the young chimpanzees who responded to body images and the Rhesus monkeys who did not, psychologic theoreticians who have presented body-image concepts—and the rest of us who understand those concepts—are Ego developed at least to the level of a young chimpanzee.

But we can find another Chinese box within this box we have just opened. It is reasonably argued that body-image concepts do not merely reflect levels of Ego development already attained by theoreticians and their audiences of understanding aficionados. In presenting information about human psychology, these concepts extend psychologic evolution beyond its previous level; body-image concepts extend body-image awareness, and thus extend Ego development. This is true for individual humans; it is true—to the extent of communication of these concepts—for the human race. An incremental contribution to *psychologic evolution* is thus made. Such considerations may seem to generate a self-reflexive paradox: that it is necessary for psychologic evolution to take place if psychologic evolution is to take place. But Time's arrow is here in flight and gives directional extension to the


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sequence. The tiniest Chinese box does not, by some esoteric magic, reflexively turn and swallow the largest box. Psychologic evolution has brought us (and the chimps) to a cognitive level from which the importance of body-image in Ego development can be recognized. The human condition is thus extended and a platform is established for additional increments of the evolutionary process.

But what part do mirrors play in this business? Obviously, mirrors do not have the primary role. Mirrors do not themselves *create* body images. The image is in the brain of the observer, no matter how many trees fall in Berkley's forest. Narcissus's reflective pool did not by some mystic art submerge his faculties and hold him suspended in eternity. It was his own fascination with his image that submerged and suspended him. The fear that a mirror will grab off one's soul can only be a product of one's initial shock of self-recognition when confronted with the 'out-there' reflection of one's Self. Despite the superstition, there is no inherent dynamism in the mirrors. The dynamism is in the psychology stimulated by the contemplation.

It is not difficult to forgive the ubiquitous tendency to invest mirrors with an inherent power. As I made my way through the maze of artifacts piled throughout the Florence Museo Archeologica, I became sharply aware of the substantial difference in nature between the mirrors and the mute masses of pots and pitchers and weaponry and ornaments and tools. It wasn't a difference of artistry, or of material quality. It was one of use, and of its consequences. The use was, of course, that of self observation, and the consequences are those we have discussed as related to Ego development and psychologic evolution. Feeling upon self-contemplation the stirrings within one's brain could easily convince the viewer that some dynamic force has emanated from that polished surface.

Surely, even without inherent magic dynamism, mirrors are handy instruments. They can serve important functions—functions not served by any other instrument. Even the most accurate or most artistically rendered oil portrait is a stiff, lumpish object in comparison to the flowing, mercurial range of self-contemplation afforded by mirrors. Mirrors instrument images of self, make them possible. Further, they enhance self-images and body-images, and thus contribute to the Ego development chain we have already considered. How can one have a self-image without an image of self? Mirrors provide images of the body which provide expansion of one's body-image—greater detail, more sophistication, resulting in a greater sense of 'that's the way it really is,' a heightened awareness of Self.

The contributions of reflective mirrors to this body-image aspect of personality development have been the subject of several scientific inquiries. An early study was reported in a book, *Mirror Magic (Spiegelzauber)* (1919) by Geza Roheim. The widespread human fascination with mirrors is the unifying theme of that book. In an article entitled *Psychological Significance of the Mirror* (1957), Paula Elkisch wrote of this fascination, "Man's mirrored image first must have appeared to him as something graspable, real. But since actually it was unreal, namely, not made of stuff he could lay his hand on, he obviously felt he was faced with his soul."

In his book, *The Dilemma of Human Identity* (1977), Heinz Lichtenstein chronicles the evolution of Ego theory and the Self concept in psychology and describes the development of a comprehensive perception of reality as the pre-eminent psychological concern for each human. He discusses contributions made by reflective mirrors to the establishment of personal identity and personal reality. "The mirror and the act of mirroring introduce problems of the emergence of a primary identity, and of identity maintenance as well. I believe that the concept of narcissism compels us to investigate the relationship between the experience of mirroring and the emergence of a primary identity on the one hand, and the relationship of such a primary identity to the development of the ego on the other hand."

Several dream studies provide informative psychological data on the emotional symbolic significance of mirrors, and their impact on development of self-perception and body-image. Milton Miller (1948) reported several dreams, occurring during the process of psychoanalysis, which featured mirrors as important dream symbols. "Each [of these dreams] ushered in new phases of the analysis, and served as guides to the ensuing struggles of the ego to master reality." Louis Kaywin (1957) related mirror dreams to self representations, which he considered to be "integral nuclei in the developing system." Alan Eisnitz (1961) concluded from his study of over 25 mirror dreams, "mirror dreams occur at a time of crisis." He associated the occurrence of mirror dreams with "an attempt at defense" on the part of the ego, in face of threat by the superego or the external environment.

David Carlson (1977) claimed that mirror dreams are relatively common and noted that dreams in which intact mirrors appear are associated with the dreamer's having made a recent creative integration of previously threatening material. In his study, dream mirrors which were shattered or were multiplied and without reflection (ref: Hoffman's reflection being stolen by Giulietta in *Tales of Hoffman*) were accompanied by terror, the emergence of disturbed behavior, or other dreams related to attempts at restitution. He concluded, "dream mirrors . . . represent an evocation of early events in which the infant came to see himself in interaction with a suitably attentive mother. In such early interaction, illusion promotes the development of instinct and ego patterns while providing a precursor of superego functioning."

All of this clinical and otherwise scientific data attests to the deep involvement of mirrors with human functioning. We are fascinated by them; we produce them by the millions and surround ourselves with them; we dream about them; they are instrumental in our maturation. Mirrors contribute to body-image, to self-image, to Ego development, to maturation of our sense of self—and thus contribute to our awareness of ourselves and to human consciousness itself. It is not an exaggeration to extrapolate from this involved instrumentality a recognition of the enhancing role played by mirrors within a wide range of human creativity—that is, within those creative ventures



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which depend significantly on complex dynamisms of the Ego, such as Literature, Art, Religion, Philosophy. And it is not outrageous to propose that without reflective mirrors, human beings would be rather different creatures.

## *MIRRORS AND HISTORY*

Accepting the intimate roles played by mirrors in the development of individual humans, we must be drawn to consider the issue of psychologic evolution in its broader sense: i.e., the evolution of human societies. Cultures are composed of individuals; in no significant way can cultural evolution be dissociated from individual psychologic evolution. The contributions of mirrors to individual development must have counterparts or projections in various characteristics of cultures, though tracing these cultural phenomena is a greatly more challenging task than examining lives of individuals. However, clues are available to assist in constructing a tentative, sketchy panorama.

To start with, we know that already in the Paleolithic world, well before the latest glaciation, human creatures possessed awareness. No matter how dimly seen, how dimly recognized, humans perceived their separate identities. This perception of identity, or being, is vividly evidenced in the graphic depictions of humans, among other creatures, in prehistoric cave paintings. A ritual celebration of self-perception is represented in the many hand tracings found on these same cave walls. It is further represented in an impressive number of contemporary ritual burial sites; relics of flower garlands buried with the ancient dead indicate a conscious deliberateness to the burial and an awareness that 'a person' was being buried here.

As the early civilizations of Homo Sapiens began to emerge from the remote mists of pre-antiquity, this proclamation of human distinctiveness intensified and was recorded in stone memorials. Strident pronouncements of ascendancy expressed the personal uniqueness of leaders of the ancient cultures—pharaohs of Early Egypt, kings and emperors of Sumeria and Babylonia and Assyria and the Indus Valley and the Far East. By and large, the masses of individuals of these early cultures remained in faceless anonymity, unidentified as specific entities. But an aristocracy of 'self' began its emergence.

Also during this period, mirrors began to appear. These cultures had begun in stone, the Neolithic era, and moved rapidly to skillful manipulation of various forms of metal. Stone mirrors, as previously described, were mostly polished jade or obsidian—often barely reflective, producing hardly accurate images, but hand-held and constant surfaces in contrast to the moving streams and rippling pools from which ancestors had snatched fleeting distorted views of themselves. The metal mirrors, of course, were technically even better. All mirrors—stone and metal—were reserved for use by those aristocrats of 'self,' who also happened to be the rich and dominant rulers of the cultures.

Yet lesser citizens, and even slaves, could surely steal glimpses of their reflections in the royal mirrors, at the odd moment when no one else was guarding the treasures. If there is no written history of those stolen moments and their effects on a broader spreading of self-perception, there is, on the other hand, an extant literature of expanded self-awareness, at the beginning of the end of the era of the primitive monolithic royalty/godhead. Individual self-awareness is implicit in the biblical history of Genesis, attested to in the story of the Judaic God's deliberateness in the creation of humans in 'His Image.' Many sections of the Old Testament are recitations of daily events in the mundane lives of generally ordinary citizens, not the luxury-blessed and glorified aristocracy. In the recording of events in the lives of common citizens can be seen a trending toward the view that 'self' was not limited to rulers and other conspicuously glorious personages.

The expanding awareness of individuality or specificity is further evidenced by Mycenean, then Greek, then Roman cultures. Increasing prominence of the self-musing, "Who am I?," is found as the centuries tumbled on in those and adjacent civilization centers. Myths, plays, stories, epics, ballads, poems, sagas, philosophic discourses, orations: in all can be found various promulgations of this speculation. Much of the recorded literature of those cultures circles around "Who am I?" That literature promoted not only contemporary consideration of the question; their market-place popularity indicates to our present-day investigation that "Who am I?" had already become comprehensible, and a lively issue.

Not to claim that increasing exposures to mirror reflections during those centuries constituted a complete dynamism for this trend in psychologic evolution. Rather to say again that mirror reflections may well have provided their multiplied catalytic contributions—a magical parcel among the rumpled litter roped to the bus of humanity as it lurches down the road. Mirrors should be seen as part of the ensemblage, having more powerful impact than some elements, not so much as others, but always touching the developing individual member of the developing culture in a most intimate fashion.

Attention to self was forced much out of fashion by the themes of esthetic religiosity emphasized during the so-called Dark Ages. Not to look for oneself; but rather to look unto one's God. Certainly in the regions dominated by Christian faiths, self-mortification and self-denial were in fashion. Also, less well recognized in the Western world, the Moslem faith during that historic era oriented itself to the will and wishes of Allah, rather than to questions of self-discovery, even to the point of proscribing pictorialization of human beings.

There are Western literary references made during that era to mirrors as unworthy indulgences, snares of vanity and sinfulness. The fairy tale *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,* which has certain features—particularly the recurrent use of the mystical number seven—indicating a medieval, pre-Renaissance origin, identifies mirror use with evil, in the wicked queen's obsessive consultations with her magic mirror. A brilliant and sensitive analysis of this fairy tale (and others) is found in Julius Heuscher's *A Psychiatric Study of Fairy Tales* (1963). Dr. Heuscher identified the Snow White legend with the exigencies of mat-



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uration and self-realization in a young woman's life, "The first period of life could be characterized as the often stormy process of recognizing one's self as a human being amongst other human beings. . . ." That first period of Snow White's life is the period during which the wicked queen daily questioned her mirror, "Who is the most beautiful?" until it was Snow White who had become both most beautiful and the object of the queen's murderous preoccupation.

If the Dark Ages was a time offering an emphasis on self-abnegation in the service of finding a God, the Renaissance took its name specifically from the rebirth of awareness of, and absorption with, one's self. Progressing from rediscovery of the Classic traditional question, "Who am I?", Renaissance themes emphasized an outbursting of self-proclamation and rejoicing: "I am!" Again, not to claim a unitary cause/effect relationship between that outbursting and a wider distribution of mirrors, but rather to underscore (at least) the timeliness of a response to readiness and demand, I point out the beginnings of mirror mass-production—in 1507, in Northern Italy, where perhaps coincidentally the Renaissance experienced its richest blossoming. In a chapter of his book, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (1975), Sacvan Bercovitch writes of a linkage between "the production of mirrors during the Renaissance with the growth of modern individualism." He affirms, "This may hold true for the humanist Renaissance."

A simple, direct path for the spiraling human psychologic evolution cannot be discovered. It is complex, variable, fluctuating. That characterization is clearly apparent in the more self-conscious historic recordings of the past five centuries, what with Reformation, Counter-Reformation, religious wars and Inquisitions, revolutions, enthronements and dethronements, usurpations. These historic perturbations are made up of many elements; self-awareness and self-realization is a significant portion of that assemblage. Mirror usage parallels, in quantity of distribution and technical quality of visualization, the prominence of the Self portion of that history.

## *MIRRORS AND A NEW STEP IN EVOLUTION*

Our present era, with its multitude of reflective surfaces, marks the beginning of a wide-spreading belief in the importance of each existential entity—not just for humanists, but also as a general world doctrine—and we observe growing emphasis on the sacredness of our experience of this Earth-planet. Our present era has its critics; it is a period variously denounced as *The Culture of Narcissism* (Christopher Lasch, 1979), *The Me Degeneration* (Morris Parloff, 1979), *The Enemies of Intimacy* (George Elliott, 1980), *The Me Generation* (Tom Wolfe, 1960s and early '70s). The criticisms registered by these observers, and others, cannot be faulted for lack of vision and are not marred by gross distortion, but these views present only one slice of the melon.

In an interview published in *San Francisco Review of Books* (John Vitale, 1980), Theodore Roszak expressed a broader view, "I believe . . . that there is a fundamental relationship between the development of the self and real social change. . . . We now have a sense of the person—of personal autonomy and originality which is spreading widely through our popular culture and touching the lives of ordinary people and giving them a sense of their own uniqueness. . . . In all of this there is more than enough frivolity for the nastiest satirists to sharpen their cynical wits on. But I choose not to mock or denigrate or satirize because I think that even these tentative and often vulgar gestures are attached to a need that deserves to be cultivated. . . . The very seeds of human culture are in that quest [of self-discovery] . . . What we must have in our society is the capacity . . . to show that there is a humane and convivial and compassionate way to be moral."

The New Ecology is an expression of that morality, and of a sharpened perception of the crucial inter-relationship of all elements of our existences and environments. That ecology can be celebrated as a remarkable, expanded realization ultimately based on heightened awareness of one's Self. When Self affirmation is soundly established, one is then able to examine beyond the boundaries of that Self. One becomes able to recognize that the whole, of which each Self is but a part, is a complex, inseparable, interwoven conglomerate of all identifiable—and even all imaginable—components.

Starting *with* ourselves, we have finally gone *beyond* ourselves to a view of Existence which can encompass all the Earth and its creatures. It is appropriate to consider the possibility that this deepened and widened perception represents the expression of yet another major transition in our psychologic evolution. We appear in this perception to have become different creatures than our ancestors. Not that this perception has never existed previously in the consciousness of one individual or another, but rather that this new ecology is an expanding trend, that it is becoming a cultural 'given' by which increasing numbers of individuals order their lives and guide their decisions and actions.

It is important to emphasize the dynamism of mirrors in this changed view. The challenge of the new ecology lies mainly in its complexity. To recognize one's world as an encompassing unity requires not only a grasp of the presence of a great array of entities, but also a comprehension of the intricate network of relationships which inextricably binds this array. To be able to understand such complexity is no small task. One has to work at it and work at it, from one stage to the next, until suddenly—it's there. We can become aware of that which is outside our own skin (at first, this may be experienced as a terror—there is a wild cat in the closet, hidden among the toys), that which is over the hedge in front of the house, that which is in the next town down the road, that which is over the horizon, 'round and 'round the entire globe, including all with all. The mind is stretched; the brain has made a conceptual jump. But not easily, sometimes not at all (As: "If you've seen one redwood tree, you've seen them all," or "Conservation is a rich man's luxury.").

I have discussed the ways in which mirrors contribute to our personal psychologic development. To deal with the complexity of the new ecology, that development must have gone beyond the stages of mere perception of



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oneself as a living creature, beyond the classic question "Who am I?", beyond the triumphant proclamation "I am!" To realize the complex totality of the Earth, individual development must have proceeded to a point where self-awareness and humility can be combined. One must be sure of Oneself. From infancy, the fascinating use of mirrors has helped us with that progression. The more we see of ourselves, the more we see of ourselves. It is no vagary that self-perception is expressed in visual terms.

But mirrors have been in this progression more than simple instruments of self-inspection. They have also been toys we have used to play with complexity. Jean Piaget was only one of the more probing delineators of the importance of Play at all stages of human life, for its creative and *re*creative values. If mirrors are useful and powerful instruments, they are also playthings. With their capacity for creating multiple image upon image, mirrors when properly arranged can reflect a visual complexity limited only by the number of mirrors available and the ultimate laws of optics. I have attended an evening chamber music concert in King Ludwig's Herrenchiemsee Palace in Bavaria. More than 2000 candles are meticulously lit one by one for these events. That in itself would present a spectacular beauty, but the hundreds of mirrors lining the walls of the great reception hall catch the lights of those candles and, in their reflections, multiply the perceived candles to five, ten thousands. This experience provided an inspiring example of mirror play, in which complexity was vividly demonstrated for my pleasure.

Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* is an excellent example of playing with mirrors and playing with complexity. "I'll tell you all my ideas about Looking Glass House. First, there's the room you can see through the glass—that's just the same as our drawing-room, only the things go the other way . . . the books are something like our books, only the words go the wrong way; I know that, because I've held up one of our books to the glass, and then they hold up one in the other room." Alice goes through the glass into the Looking Glass room: "Then she began looking about, and noticed that what could be seen from the old room was quite common and uninteresting, but that all the rest was as different as possible. . . . the very clock on the chimney piece . . . had got the face of a little old man, and grinned at her."

Mirrors help bring us to the stage of personal development where the new ecology can make some sense, where it can be comprehended. And mirrors afford us the opportunity to play with the reality of complexity, assisting us in mastering that very difficult realization.

## *MIRRORS AND THE FUTURE*

It is a poetic irony—and poetically appropriate—that mirrors have a crucial instrumental role in what may well be the next significant step of human psychologic evolution. Having helped us to attain the level of maturation and realization of complexity necessary for ecologic comprehension—and that attainment is not yet a universally completed state (one thinks of the movie *The Deer Hunter*)—mirrors have been aiding us during the past couple of hundred years in an endeavor which will undoubtedly have vast future significance for our psychologic evolution.

Mirroring surfaces all over the Earth have now been turned outward to the seemingly limitless Universe in which we are immersed. Mirrors are crucial parts of many of the remarkable instruments we use to explore a Space—a new dimension—we can't even imagine a meaning for. Only a few of us even grasp the significance of what is—and is not—visualized by the use of those mirrors, and none of us knows what to make of it. Our accustomed reaction is to focus our thoughts onto projections (reflections) of ourselves in space, to think of the religious contexts of a heavenly expanse populated by human spirits and heavenly entities with human faces and a God whose image we each duplicate. Or we play in our fiction and in our sciences with literal self-projections into Space, conjecturing about other earths and human colonies in the Void. We try to send messages to them, receive messages from them, establish some communication network. Very few of us have evolved beyond that level in thinking about the Void; none of us can yet guess how to think about the presently unthinkable.

The same mirrors with which we have affirmed the importance of human-kind are bringing us face-to-face with our immense insignificance. And yet there is a grandeur here for humans. We are an unfinished species, and in our confrontation with the Void we are reminded of our potentials. Our mirror wanderings in the vast expanses of Space are a further part of the evolutionary voyage in whose experience we grip our dynamisms, our vitality. □

CAROL FROST

## BIRTHDAY

I screamed, we both screamed;
out of our heads, bloody and splendid.
I asked your sex

and desired only to sleep.
A nurse I will never forget
put ice on my clay thighs

and rocked me in a warm lake.
Teeth of lilies, Lorelei,
I dreamt of you whole

and dear-achieved.
Sun roused us both.
Machinery of the town started up.

They brought you in,
and we began the first day.



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# Related Illnesses

One evening this past summer, during dinner, my beeper went off. I am an intern at a university hospital, new in my job, and a beeper page at dinner generally means something urgent is happening—a heart stopped, a blood pressure falling. One gets ready to rush for the elevator. I left my soggy ham sandwich, my bitter Coke in a paper cup, and hurried to the phone.

"What's up?" I said.

"You the intern up here tonight?" It was Ernie. Ernie was a senior resident in Medicine, working on another service. His grandmother, Mrs. Jonas, was a patient on our floor, and he was always flipping through her chart or examining her, always second-guessing us.

"Yeah, what is it?" I said.

"I want to know what's going on. Why are all those needles by my grandmother's bed?"

"I was going to check her coags after dinner."

"You have *two* tubes."

"Well, sometimes the vacuum doesn't work on one."

"And number nineteen butterflies. What do you think you're doing?"

"Drawing blood." I was in no mood to argue about the size needles one should use to draw blood. "The floor's out of twenty-ones."

"I don't want you sticking my grandmother with a goddamn number nineteen, understand?"

"No, not really."

"I'll draw it," he said. "Just do me a favor, don't ever stick her with nineteens."

"Be my guest." I slammed the receiver down. Fury seemed to have settled permanently in my psyche, as much a part of my equipment as the stethoscope draped around the back of my neck, the rubber tourniquet tied to my clipboard or the beeper clipped to my belt like a pistol. The elevators were always on the blink, my feet hurt, I was aching for sleep: these were givens. But not one On-Call night went by without a page from Ernie. He always managed to interrupt dinner. Not that it was much to interrupt. I looked around at the vending machines. The cafeteria was closed for the summer—an economy move—and no one seemed to care that the interns lived on stale sandwiches. I finished mine as slowly as possible, praying that Ernie, with his worn-down soles and graying hair, was off my floor by the time I got back.

My grandmother needs suctioning. Tell the nurse to get in here and change the sheets. Why isn't the head of the bed up? Didn't you stop the Gent and Carb yet? Christ, her BUN's been rising for a week. Where are the calorie counts recorded? How come *you* never know what's going on here?

And Mrs. Jonas wasn't even my patient. She belonged to Carolyn, the other intern on my floor. Carolyn wrote the orders every morning, Carolyn made decisions with our Junior Resident and our Attending. My job was just to keep the old lady breathing until morning rounds. Don't let her bleed out, culture her for fevers, bang her chest if she arrests. Simple.

When I got upstairs Ernie was gone. So were the syringes, the butterfly needles, the two blue-topped test tubes I had placed by the old lady's bed half an hour before. I assumed that meant Ernie had drawn her blood. Which was fine with me.

I looked at the old lady lying there in bed, scarcely rattling the phlegm in her throat. It was amazing to me that she breathed. She looked—and this is no exaggeration—like one of the mummies in the British Museum, unwrapped. Toothless, her face was ravaged and dessicated, its skin tough as papyrus. Her limbs were leather-wrapped sticks, except for the artificial prosthesis which bulged from one hip. Infection kept the wound from closing. When she spoke, which was rarely, it was in German. Ernie understood; I didn't want to. I knew enough. The broken hip only started it all. It was set properly, scientifically. Then came complications. A wound infection. Pulmonary embolus. Pneumonia. This week we wondered if she had a myocardial infarction—a heart attack. She was the disaster case every intern dreads, a guarantee of three hours work a night. And Ernie took an hour more.

Ernie came back later that night. I had worked up three new admissions and was exhausted.

"I want you to listen to her breathe," he said. I followed him into her room. The old lady was sleeping peacefully, a bit of rattling in her throat, nothing more. "Listen! That's a disgrace! Why isn't she getting suctioned?"

"Ask the nurse."

"I did. She says she's the only nurse on the floor and I should talk to you."

"Well, your grandmother's not in respiratory distress. . ." My anger flared, then burst. I just wanted to sleep, never mind a little phlegm in an old lady's throat. It was two a.m. I looked at Ernie; he was exhausted. He had his own service downstairs, and wasn't even On tonight. He was a jerk for staying here, no question about it. But in a way I admired him. He had courage. He was not afraid to touch her or examine her or draw her blood—and he nursed her as closely as I imagine John Keats, doctor as well as poet, nursed his brother Tom when Tom was dying of tuberculosis. I said, "Maybe she needs a private nurse."

"Maybe you should do your job," he said.

I walked away.

The next morning after Rounds I spoke to my Resident.

"Can't you get Ernie off my back? It's getting ridiculous. Who cares if I draw blood with a nineteen needle? He has no *sense!*"

"Oh, it's his grandmother," said my Resident. "You'd probably do the same thing. I know I would."

"Some grandmother," I said. "I go to draw her blood and she lies there and spits at me. That's the only way I know she's alive."

He shrugged. "Maybe I'll talk to him."

"Do."

He did. Three nights later I was

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On Call, and Ernie paged me again, this time *stat,* to the nursing station. I ran down the hall, and stopped when I saw him.

"What is it, Ernie?"

"I want you to look at her hand."

I went and looked at her hand. Its birdbones were almost lost in a soft purple bag of blood, as they had been since that morning. The technician had not applied pressure long enough after drawing his blood sample. Anyway, it wasn't my fault. It was just one of those things that happen in a hospital and usually don't make any difference. It did seem, though, that more than the usual number of these things were happening to Ernie's grandmother. Carolyn had calculated the wrong dose of Tobramycin. The oxygen had been turned too low when we came by on Rounds that morning, the heparin too high. Somehow she had gotten an extra liter of fluid during the day, and now had rales half-way up her back. My Resident said doctors and doctors' relatives get worse care than any other patients admitted to a hospital—and I was beginning to see why. I felt kind of sorry for Ernie.

"Is there anything I can do about it?" I said. I held her hand in mine, feeling the soft purplish bag. A grandmother's hand. My grandmother had died only a year before.

"No, nothing," he said. "Just check her later, would you, and make sure she has the mask on?"

"All right," I said.

He went off. I stayed in there, looking at her. Tonight she looked move shrivelled than ever, further from the realms of existence that the rest of us inhabit. It is no joke to say that most cadavers in Anatomy Lab are more promising material. I know. I've seen them. On the other hand, it was a kind of miracle that this shrunken infant of a nonagenarian was refusing to die, but lay there day after day, breathing. She had all the regalia of hopeless extremism—three IV's, a catheter in her bladder, electrodes on her chest attached to a bedside cardiac monitor, a rubber drain in her hip wound. Her hand, which I still held, squeezed mine. Just a grasp reflex, I knew, an infantile relic that reappears with senescence. A release sign, it is called. Release from what? I looked at her shrunken face, almost lost behind an oxygen mask. She was looking at me. Big popping eyes followed me as I moved. I tried to imagine her young but failed. Behind the oxygen mask she was mumbling German. That was fine. I'd rather not understand what she was saying. It was easier to give up that way. But why couldn't Ernie be reasonable?

* * *

My own grandmother was different. With her it was not a question of doing too much, but of total incapacity to forestall the arrival of death. We are all doctors of one sort or another in my family, yet we could do nothing. My father is a cardiologist, my uncle an internist, my mother a pediatrician, and her father, my grandfather, also a cardiologist, still reads medical journals at ninety. I was a medical student at the time. All doctors, all trained to diagnose and cure, above all to act. Yet when my grandmother made up her mind to die, none of us could oppose her. It took little more than a year for her to win.

She was a child of the West. She was born in Nebraska in the 'nineties when the main streets of Omaha were ruts of dirt, plowed every day by hooves and iron-hooped wheels, and lined with high, gloomy wooden houses on either side, shutting out the prairie. Her mother died soon after childbirth from an infection that birth gave to her, her father was a laywer who didn't give much thought to his baby girl but wanted to be a man about town, such as one could be in Omaha at the turn of the century; so my grandmother was raised by her grandfather. He was an immigrant, a politician, a newspaperman, once telegrapher to Abraham Lincoln, and like Lincoln he died of an assassin's bullet—on the front steps of his newspaper, *The Omaha Bee.* What always struck me most in growing up was not that he had always been on the wrong side of politics, in favor of the banks and railroads and against the Populists, but that he did business with Buffalo Bill. As an entrepreneur, he was smart enough to get a cut of producing the Wild West Show when it came to Omaha, and the young girl he cared for, his granddaughter, had her photograph taken sitting on Buffalo Bill's knee. Nothing in the rest of her life would match this. Buffalo Bill gave her a tobacco pouch, a piece of Indian bead and leather-work that is still among the family's possessions, a stiff and dry relic we grandchildren used to take for show-and-tell, knowing we were made a part of history by touching it, and that our wrinkled, pleasant grandmother who invited us over to watch TV after school and made Boston Coolers—floats of root beer and vanilla ice cream—and read mystery novels and Shakespeare, was no ordinary woman: she was history.

She was a cranky, mean, depressed, incontinent, impatient, forgetful woman before she died. For two years her life was a constant misery that we might have alleviated. But nothing was done. In William Carlos Williams' poem "The Last Words of My English Grandmother," I see the woman my grandmother became:

> There were some dirty plates
> and a glass of milk
> beside her on a small table
> near the rank disheveled bed
>
> Wrinkled and nearly blind
> she lay and snored
> rousing with anger in her tones
> to cry for food
>
> Gimme something to eat—
> They're starving me—

Here are the traces of long misery; the observer is familiar with this scene, which as a doctor he has often seen before, and he can enumerate the elements of decay. But he pulls away. Though he is a grandson, her illness makes them unrelated, and though he is a doctor he cannot cure. She dies on the way to the hospital.

> What are all those
> fuzzy-looking things out there?
> Trees? Well, I'm tired
> of them and rolled her head away.

And that is the end of the poem. Fortunate for Williams, poet and doctor, the death came quickly, mercifully, leaving him, the survivor, free to mourn.

My grandmother died slowly. She starved herself. It was a nonviolent, gentlewoman's choice. But it was mercilessly slow. The stroke came first. Actually, thirty years before, she had lost her breasts to cancer, a catastrophe which first threatened, then was forgotten. It never recurred. At sixty-five she went around the world, at seventy she revised her cookbook of diets for patients with heart disease for a third edition, and for another decade she cooked innumerable birthday cakes for sixteen grandchildren and played bridge twice a week.

The stroke was mild. It left her



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with a droop on one side of her face, a tremor in one arm. But it ruined shopping, because people stared. And it ruined reading, or what was left of it. Already cataracts had forced her to large-print books, driving her away from Shakespeare and to thick mysteries, with only a paragraph of intrigue per page. The stroke ruined book-holding and page-turning and snacks of cookies and sweet tea between chapters.

Slowly, she stopped everything. The books my mother brought from the library sat in thick, plastic dust-jacketed piles on the dining room table. She ate less and less. She wanted to die.

The family conferred, consultations of one doctor with another. Why would such a small event affect her so profoundly? It did not take long to find a medically sound answer: depression. And informally, her treatment was planned. Physical therapy was indicated for her stroke-weakened limbs; she needed better medication for her heart condition; activities with other elderly Jewish ladies at Menorah Park; and to help with feedings, a live-in nurse.

How much better off we were, modern and scientific, coping with our problem than John Keats, who was poorly and reluctantly trained as a surgeon and apothecary and tried to nurse his brother Tom back to health. All Keats could do was observe:

"Tom is not up yet—I cannot say he is better."

"Poor Tom is no better tonight—I am afraid to ask him what message I shall send from him—"

"Tom has spat a leetle blood this afternoon, and that is rather a damper—but I know—the truth is there is something real in the World."

At times he hopes: "I think Tom has been rather better these few last days—he has been less nervous."

And finally, the day of Tom's death, in a letter to his sister, Fanny, Keats writes: "—he is in a very dangerous state—I have scar[c]e any hopes of him."

To save Tom, Keats needed INH and Rifampin, antituberculous drugs. One might speculate these drugs could have saved John Keats too from a miserable, premature death in Italy, where Joseph Severn nursed him, as Keats had nursed his brother Tom. But why waste time on the past, when the best of treatment was inadequate? We had the advantages of scientific medicine and we were all doctors—surely we could solve this problem.

Rehabilitation was the key, said my father, the cardiologist. She was depressed, my mother, the pediatrician, believed. She needed to get out of the house, to get more stimulation, thought my uncle, the internist. I wondered whether her doctor was on top of the medical problems.

A round-the-clock nurse was obtained at considerable expense. My mother got Talking Books. My father spoke with her doctor. Everyone thought there must be some sort of geriatric program in which she could get involved. But nothing came of it.

"I don't like that *girl*," said my grandmother. The "girl" was a sixty year old practical nurse with grandchildren of her own. "I can't eat what she cooks. She drinks, I can smell it on her breath. She doesn't come when I ring for her. Slow as molasses. Honestly," she said to my mother, "Can't you find somebody else?"

Another nurse was hired. She quickly became sullen and slow, sitting for hours on a stool in the kitchen, looking out at the back garden, and quit after a month. Another was obtained; then a series of calm, dignified, middle-aged nurses appeared, only to grow angry and quit or be fired. None would do. One cheated on her taxes, another was caught going through the silver, and none of them could make her comfortable, or get to her before whatever bodily urge she felt became unbearable.

She didn't want any part of Menorah Park.

"I don't know those old people. What do I have to say to them?"

"Nellie shouldn't have to go out," said my grandfather. "It's too hard on her." And as for physical therapy, that was too hard on her as well. And the medications—well, she had been going to the same doctor for years, and he thought everything was all right. He didn't see the need for changing anything.

The Talking Books, the food, the nurses—even the color television which her three children had bought—were too much. "Oh *heavens*, leave me alone!" She sat in the soft leather armchair in the dining room, by the swinging door which led to the pantry, with an aluminum walker before the chair, pads underneath her to keep things dry, untouched food on the tray by her side, along with letters, postcards, magazines, books my mother continued to check out of the library for her, all untouched. What she did touch was a little silver bell, used to call the nurse, and this she would reach for again and again, often barely letting the nurse leave the room before ringing again.

Of her three children, one did not become a doctor. At the age of fifteen he was given a motion picture camera, and from his first shaky footage of the 1939 World's Fair, has done little but make movies. He never left Ohio, though, or medicine either, really, for his films are about aphasia and heart disease and health programs in industry. And he took movies of birthdays, holidays, anniversaries. He shot footage of his parents, my grandparents, at their fiftieth anniversary, one June, and it shows her, a few months before her death, thin and irritable, pushed from anniversary cake in the dining room to a reception in the living room, to group pictures in the back yard, by the full-blooming foxglove and the thick foliage of pear and apple trees. It is a bright, muggy Ohio summer day. Every so often she attempts a smile, but mostly it is irritability that one sees, or an expression as if she had just drunk something very bitter.

She died that Fall.

I was in California then, working in a county hospital in a smog-bound valley, doing surgery. My resident was a greyhound-thin, balding man with a wizened face and cancer of the stomach. His disease had made him bitter and malignant. I think the only things he loved were his hunting dogs, Blue and Brandy, and he spent whatever time he could lying in his duck blind on the Bay with a shotgun in his hands, waiting for birds.

I told him there was a death in my family and I had to go back to Ohio for the funeral.

"Who died?" he said.

"My grandmother."

"Your *grand*mother? You have to leave for that?

"Well, my family. . ."

He shrugged. "Just let somebody know if you come back before the end of the month."

On the plane back East, I practiced surgical knots, looping strands of triple-0 black nylon to the back of the seat ahead of me, whipping the threads around with one and two-handed knots, until the suture ends were too short to tie. I scarcely looked out at the country over which we were flying; instead I thought of layers of



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skin, fat, fascia, a succession of muscle fibers set at a bias to each other, leading down into a red narrow opening of belly, which soon after opening began filling up with blood. I stood to one side holding the liver back with a flat metal retractor. My Resident had been in a scarcastic mood. "Goddamn it," he said, "I can't see a damn thing. Come on, pull! Pull on that retractor. You want to go to your grandmother's funeral? Then you better pull until you fasciculate!"

Throughout the funeral service and the reception later at my grandfather's house, I kept thinking of the operation and trying to figure out why my fingers were still so slow tying knots. Only later would I discover that my technique, furious as it might be, was entirely wrong. I wore the blue suit from my high school graduation and stood in front of the chapel, greeting my grandparents' friends and collecting signatures in a book. I was dazed, exhausted, no more in Ohio than my grandmother herself.

The eulogy was given by our rabbi, a large weary man who did not know my grandmother. She was not a religious woman, but had been known to the previous rabbi, a famous Zionist and orator, father of the one who stood before us now, searching for words. She had outlived the Zionist, though.

After the service, everyone drove over to my grandfather's house for a reception. The place had been straightened up, and the dining room table pushed up to the front window and covered with a tablecloth and food, and two black women in white uniforms, like nurses, were serving punch. People grouped around my grandfather, who looked frail and stunned, small in his baggy suit. There were doctors all over. My family, his old colleagues, and friends. My grandmother's leather chair had been stripped of its waterproof cover, and the tray by its side had been removed, but the silver bell and a stack of tapes, not yet returned to the company that rented Talking Books, had been moved to the buffet and apparently forgotten there, and the leather pillows of the chair were still indented by my grandmother's shape, as if her weight, invisibly, remained there.

Then I felt like crying. Until that time it had been as if there were no death. What had occurred at the synagogue was not a funeral but a memorial service, and there had been no casket, no mention of a cemetery or headstone, no evidence that the woman who was being remembered had been alive only two days before. That death was there was an accident, embarrassing as a drunk guest or a family quarrel, something to turn away from in silence, to attempt to ignore. So many doctors and no cure.

The Anatomy Lab was fresh in my mind. The smell of formalin, the big plastic zippered bags like the ones we used to see on the news from the front during Vietnam. A dozen cadavers lay in that room, two dozen students worked on them, in a year making lifelike shapes into horrors of nerves, vessels and bones. No wonder as my grandmother failed I did not want to know the details—no wonder I did not care to hear that she was in the hospital again, or want to visit her there. The smell of formalin from Anatomy Lab penetrated our rubber gloves and permeated our hair, frequently we would joke about why we were standing with scalpels and forceps while these others lay in their bags. Why them, not us? Later we became comfortable to the point of sacrilege, drinking Cokes and eating birthday cake before opening our dissecting manuals and the zippered bags. But that was no more rational than the fear of touching we had at first. What remained, I suppose, was panic, a fear of getting too near to the otherness of death, which the doctor feels almost as strongly as he feels an attraction toward, a fascination with, disease.

There was a friend of my father's, a young cardiologist, who must have faced this panic. He was found one day sitting in his car by the side of a thruway, dead. He was young, in his forties, just beginning to make his name in the field of exercise research, and what happened was that he died of a heart attack. I can imagine how this happened, how he felt the pain in his chest while driving down the highway, a crushing weight so utterly typical, so clearly diagnostic of an acute myocardial infarction, how he slowed his car down and pulled to the side of the road and turned off his car, and then sat there, knowing exactly what was happening to the anterior descending branch of his left coronary artery, and how the muscle was dying, and how he himself was dying, exactly as he had seen a thousand men die during his training, just as the textbooks say. This is all my imagination, and perhaps it did not happen at all like this. But probably it did. And most likely this was not the first time he felt that pain in his chest, most likely he was meaning to go see his doctor about it, one of these days. But as a doctor he was busy, and probably it was not worth becoming a patient just for that pain. I imagine this is why he died.

On Tuesday the 18th of August, 1818, John Keats wrote to his sister Fanny:

> I did not intend to have returned to London so soon but have a bad sore throat from a cold I caught in the island of Mull: therefore I thought it best to get home as soon as possible and went on board the Smack from Cromarty. . . .
> Tom has not been getting better since I left London and for the past fortnight has been worse than ever—he has been getting a little better for these two or three days. . . .
> —all I can say now is that you[r] Letter is a very nice one without fault and that you will hear from or see in a few days if ~~my~~ his throat will let him,
> Your affectionate Brother
> John.

The last sentence is ungrammatical—there is no object for the verbs. Shall Fanny hear from John or Tom or both? And more revealingly, Keats crosses out "my" and writes "his." Whose throat is it that prevents Fanny from visiting? Who is the patient? The sore throat from a cold caught in the island of Mull will persist, for it is likely this was the beginning of tuberculosis. Soon after this John Keats will cough drops of bright red arterial blood. "I cannot be deceived in that colour; that drop is my death-warrant. I must die." This is Lord Houghton's report of Keats' reaction. But Keats, in his letter to Fanny Brawne, admits to saying only, "This is unfortunate." Is this the essence of the doctor's fear? Does a related illness, the illness of a relative, presage the doctor's own death? Keats nursed his younger brother Tom into death, and only two years later Keats himself was to be nursed through a horrible voyage to Rome, a voyage of death, by his friend, Severn. Behind his starched white coat the doctor is terrified that instead of the student of disease he will become disease itself. No wonder doctors are not permitted to treat their own families or themselves.

* * *

I do not remember much more about



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the day of my grandmother's funeral, except that my grandfather looked every one of his eight-nine years, and that after awhile everyone went out back to the garden, and stood on wet grass before a pear tree loaded with hard, small fruit, and posed for family snapshots. The next day I went back to California and to surgery. It was a wonderful month, and for awhile I was sure I would become a surgeon. Every day I awoke at five a.m. and hurried to the hospital, where I could hardly wait to put on my greens and scrub up to my elbows with yellow-soaped sponges, then rush into cool tiled rooms where a gown would be pulled on me and tied and tight gloves snapped onto my hands, and then lean up against the operating table, holding retractors and peering into body cavities—just waiting for my chance to get hold of forceps and needle-holder and bring skin back together. My knots came fast and tight. The skin I sewed met in smooth lines. Even my cancerous resident stopped saying his dogs were smarter than me and asked if I was interested in doing more months of surgery. I did do more surgery after that, cardiac surgery, and loved it. But by the end of it I was sick—a variety of minor complaints, nothing that sleep and regular meals would not alleviate—and when I got better I realized that I had cracked more chests, peered at more diseased hearts and sewed more skin than I would ever care to remember. And only a long time later did I realize that I despised the whole experience, and that really I felt sorry for that resident, and that it had all been a kind of mourning.

* * *

The night before she died, Mrs. Jonas, as always, spat at me as I drew her blood. I crouched at her side, careful to advance the needle so it punctured only one side of the slippery vein, then coursed along inside. No spittle hit me—she could only purse her lips and blow air through them. But the intent was clear.

"Come on, lady, take it easy," I said. As though talk would make any difference. I did feel better about things, though: she had been declared NTBR—not be be resuscitated if her heart stopped. I did not know all the details, whether the Chief Resident had talked to Ernie, or whether Ernie and his family had just gotten tired of it all. But I did know there were no more emergencies.

I finished drawing her blood, and put pressure on the puncture site for five minutes. I didn't want it to bleed, not with Ernie around. The old lady stared at me as if I had just shot her in the heart. I went off to do my fever rounds before going to sleep.

When I woke up it was already light out, and a nurse was shaking me.

"Mrs. Jonas' pressure is still down."

"What?"

"I told you before it had dropped. Remember?"

Did I remember?

"What is it now?"

"It was sixty over forty. Now it's fifty over zero."

"Oh Jesus."

I got up. It was six-thirty a.m., almost time for Rounds, the hour that old ladies die. Mrs. Jonas was flat on her back in bed, wasted and motionless as Nefertiti. Her skin was gray. I felt her wrist, just above the purple bag of blood, but there was no pulse. I felt her neck. A beat, then another, then nothing. So life fades. I looked at her for a long time. I pounded her chest once, then again. Nothing. I put down the head of the bed, turned the IV up all the way, then realized, almost as an afterthought, that she was not breathing. Should I breathe her? I looked out the window at the river below, at rush hour traffic crossing the bridge and at three tugboats pushing a barge upstream. NTBR meant don't breathe her. But still. . . My own grandmother had faded off too; she had woken only at the last moment to call her husband, my grandfather: "Come here, Harold, I need you!" When he and my mother came back in the room—they had been on their way to the elevator—she was dead.

Eventually I turned off the IV. She was, after all, NTBR. Enough was enough.

I caught Ernie in the hall, just a few minutes before Morning Rounds, and when I stopped him I thought he was going to punch me in the face. But instead he looked almost apologetic.

"How did it happen?" he said.

I told him, more or less.

He said something I could not make out.

"What?"

"Thank you," he said. I looked at him. "I . . . look, I'm going to go in and see her. And then call my family. Look, could you just make sure the papers are filled out early, so we can get her to the funeral home?"

"Sure," I said. Then I went off to Rounds. It was not until six p.m., after I had written all my notes and was ready to leave the hospital, that Ernie paged me.

"You the intern. . .?"

"Yeah, what?" Then I remembered. "Oh damn it, I forgot! I'm sorry, Ernie."

"That's all right, I know how it gets," he said.

When I came downstairs to the front desk, to fill out the death papers, he was not there. I leaned up against a counter and began to sign my name to the forms for the City of New York, on which were typed out the name and address of Gretchen Jonas and the causes of death:

*Respiratory Arrest* occurring as a complication of
*Myocardial Infarction* occurring as a complication of
*Pulmonary Embolus* occurring as a complication of
*Hip Fracture.*

"That's no good," said the woman at the desk when I handed it to her.

"What do you mean?"

"You have to use a black pen."

I looked at my name, written in blue ink.

"Do you have a black pen? I'll trace over it."

"I can't do that. The City won't accept it."

"I'll take the responsibility."

"You can't. No way. You have to write the whole thing over."

"Oh for Christ's sake."

"Or you can wait for the forms to be typed again. That'll take until tomorrow."

"I swear, we spend more time here with the dead patients than the live ones," I said.

She gave me the forms. I remembered what Keats wrote after Tom died, in a letter to his other brother, George: "During poor Tom's illness I was not able to write and since his death the task of beginning has been a hindrance to me."

"Do you have a black pen?" I said.

She slapped it down on the counter, with that peculiar fury New Yorkers have when imposed on.

"Thanks a lot," I said. I began to write. —*David Hellerstein*



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*My First Summer in the Sierra*, by John Muir. Houghton Mifflin. $5.95

# John Muir Re-Found:

## Something Gloried In

It is well to look again at John Muir's *My First Summer in the Sierra*, recently re-issued (1979) in a Houghton Mifflin paperback, for it is a book about discoveries that a pessimist today would say are no longer possible. Indeed, in viewing today's forests and rivers, who would dare rhapsodize the way Muir did in 1869: "Divine, enduring, unwastable wealth?" Scars on the mountains and scum on the waters show our readiness to waste one kind of wealth for another, and to find the expedient in what he discovered as the divine and enduring. Contrasting the California Sierra of Muir's day with that of ours, where tens of thousands tramp the same trails each year, is to sense something missing in today's wilderness that once he gloried in. We are inclined, therefore, to interpret Muir's book as thoroughly nineteenth century, and to feel a confirming melancholy that such adventures as those he once took are done with. Acid rain and the industry of leisure have seen to that. Yet the re-issue may yield insights that even the pessimist will quicken to, insights into Muir, the adventurer, and what he discovered as true.

Granted that Muir's account, which consists of journal notes written in 1869, is a valuable nineteenth century document. Before Ellery Sedgwick, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, published it in 1911 (January-April), he wrote to Muir about its effect: "I felt almost as if I had found religion." Houghton Mifflin published it in enlarged form as a book later the same year.

American literature of that so-called innocent century celebrated the untrammeled forest and glen, and the white man's entry was a paradise regained. Whether as a Natty Bumppo, fleet as a shaft of sunshine, or a Huckleberry Finn adrift on invisible currents, the American claimed a world of nature both mysterious and divine. Thoreau's *Walden* recounts the American apotheosis of this bygone century when a person could revel in the purity of things. Muir's record of his summer in 1869 captures this same exaltation. No evidence of rubbish or waste blighted his spirit as he roamed the sun-spangled meadows in the high Sierra where "everything," he said, "is perfectly clean and pure and full of divine lessons." With Cathedral Peak ahead and the meadows, lakes, and woods all about, he exclaimed, "How wild everything is—wild as the sky and as pure!"

It would be a mistake, however, to interpret Muir's important book as only a testimony of innocence befitting the past. To read *Walden* this way would also be to miss its universal theme. Like the Concord philosopher, Muir celebrates more than a pre-defiled nature. His real subject is self-discovery. Like that of his predecessor, Muir's book is profoundly autobiographical. At the age of 31 he experienced—he did not merely speculate or understand—he *experienced* confirmation that all things are "hitched" together in the universe, that design is the eternal rule, and that his own heart pulsed in harmony with the universal throb. He discovered an awakened self, a "conversion" he called it, a sublime consciousness that to be truly in the mountains is to have them in oneself, quickening every nerve and filling every pore and cell. That Muir was a great American discoverer has less to do with California's mountains than with the human spirit whose frontiers are never closed to beauty and divinity. The nineteenth century had no monopoly upon this kind of exploration or upon the joy that awaits the discoverer. The Sierra beckoned Muir no less than Walden Pond did Thoreau, and the joyful discoveries both men experienced remain a universal antidote as relevant to their contemporaries as to those who lead lives of desperation today.

* * *

Scottish Calvinism seems an unlikely inheritance for the Romanticist that Muir was later to become. Born in Dunbar, Scotland, in 1838 to Daniel Muir and Ann Gilrye Muir, John was the third of eight children, each of whom learned early the meaning of discipline. Dictated by their father who had no qualms about whipping disobedient children, this rigor applied first of all to hard work. Play was thought to be Satan's ploy. Rigor also applied to moral seriousness that presupposed obedience to God's law. As arbiter in these matters, Daniel Muir intensified his strictures when he emigrated in February 1849 to central Wisconsin with his children John, David, and Sarah, the rest of the family arriving in America later that year. They settled on what Daniel called Fountain Lake Farm; six years later they developed a new farm (Hickory Hill) some six miles southeast of Fountain Lake and nearer Portage. The back-breaking farm work reportedly stunted John's growth, and at least three of the other children (Daniel Jr., Sarah, and Margaret) suffered precarious health in later life possibly because of their father's relentless demands. It was common gossip among the neighbors, according to biographer Linnie Marsh Wolfe, that "Old Man Muir works his children like cattle." On Sundays his authority carried special gravity when, as an itinerant "preaching elder" or lay preacher, he exhorted not only his family but congregations throughout Marquette County.

When John Muir recalled these early years in his autobiographical *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*, published the year before his death in 1914, he said less about the stern upbringing than about the happy memories of his native Scotland and farm life in Wisconsin. Dunbar's North Sea shore, the wind-swept fields and sky, and the craggy ruins of the town's castle afforded ample wildness for what he remembered as his "Saturday runaways." In spite of the "sore punishments that followed

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like shadows," nothing availed against these attractions or deterred what he called his "wild blood" that ran as true on its course as the "unstoppable" stars on theirs. As for what came next, he wrote, "Oh, that glorious Wisconsin wilderness." Burdensome farm chores plus his father's outrageously severe whippings for even simple, playful forgetfulness were insignificant compared with the thrill of hearing the woods full of song sparrows, brown thrushes, chickadees, and whippoorwills; of fishing and swimming in Fountain Lake fringed with water-lily, lady's slipper, and goldenrod; of reveling in the colors that the changing seasons brought to the oaks, tamaracks, hickories, and willows. Although he was to have but two months of school between his migration from Scotland at the age of 11 and his enrolling in the University of Wisconsin in 1861 when he was 23, he managed to transform severe exterior restraints into an essential self-discipline that later would brook no distraction in his quest to know the wonders of nature.

Also intrigued by mechanical contrivances, he augmented his required reading of the Bible and surreptitious reading of Sir Walter Scott and Alexander von Humboldt with books on algebra, trigonometry, and geometry. He began inventing little conveniences for the farm: waterwheels, windmills, a rotary saw, clocks, thermometers, barometers. What drew him to Madison was the September 1860 State Agricultural Fair where, despite his father's admonitions about the sin of pride, he successfully exhibited two clocks and a thermometer he had designed and built. What kept him in Madison was the University. He enrolled the following January and soon came under the influence of Dr. Ezra Slocum Carr and his wife, Mrs. Jeanne C. (Smith) Carr—the one a noted glaciologist and former student of Louis Agassiz, and the other a botanist who was also well-read in the humanities. Another influence was that of Dr. James D. Butler, who introduced him to literary classics including the works of Emerson and encouraged him in writing personal notebooks and journals. After three years at the University of Wisconsin, however, he made the momentous decision not to return for a final year and graduation, not to prepare for a career in medicine, in fact not to commit himself to any profession but instead to heed the call of the wild—to take a long walk through Upper Michigan and Canada's Georgian Bay country and then by blue Ontario's shore.

This sojourn proved only a prelude to the more ambitious one he began in September 1867. The previous year he had worked in an Indianapolis factory where an accident had nearly cost him the use of one eye. After recovering full sight, he quit his job, returned home to visit his parents at Hickory Hill, and soon thereafter started on a walking excursion through Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, and Louisiana. On the flyleaf of his first extant journal, published posthumously in 1917 as *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf,* he designated his address as "John Muir, Earth-Planet, Universe." At 29 he was determined more than ever to be his own system and not a satellite of his father's. His journal includes descriptions of variegated flora and fauna, including the plant life of Cuba where he spent most of January 1868, but of more importance is the

unmistakable romanticism woven through his notations. He believed that every particle of nature including the human is joined together in divine harmony, no one part being any more favored by God, the Creator, than any other part. This idea informs the entire journal, especially his description, on the final page, of his first seeing California's Sierra. It was now March; Muir had sailed from Cuba to New York, then to San Francisco, and three days later had set out for the mountains. When still 50 or more miles away he felt their "spiritual power." You "bathe in these spirit-beams," he wrote, and presently "you lose consciousness of your separate existence: you blend with the landscape, and become part and parcel of nature."

Muir had to wait until the following summer to have this credo, taken from Emerson's *Nature,* fully confirmed. For the nonce he worked as a harvest hand and sheep herder near La Grange and Snelling, regaining strength that malarial fever the previous winter in Cuba had dangerously sapped. But the spring of 1869 found him ready to enter the "glorious wilderness" for which all his wanderings thus far had been but a preparation. Hired as a sheep herder by rancher Pat Delaney, whom he called Don Quixote, Muir accompanied him and three other herders when they left June 3 to find summer pasturage near the headwaters of the Merced and Tuolumne Rivers in the high meadows of the Sierra.

Nothing he had known before or would experience later compared with the joy of that first summer; and nothing he would write later had the exciting spontaneity of his account. The book belongs in the forefront of America's nature literature. Ever ascending in the direction of the Merced and Tuolumne divide, he declared June to be "the greatest of all the months of my life, the most truly, divinely free, boundless like eternity, immortal." Up the Merced River and into the Yosemite Valley, which to Muir resembled an Edenic paradise, he beheld sights that left him too excited to sleep: thundering falls, streams, precipices three thousand feet high fringed with trees—"everything kept in joyful rhythmic motion in the pulses of Nature's big heart." Matching the grandeur was the mystery of every hidden cell of a tree, every fiber of leaf and root, "throbbing with music and life." Stones were "altars," the Valley a "temple," and he a "pilgrim" amid the "holy mountains." One glorious Sierra day followed another, dissolving and absorbing and sending him "pulsing onward" into what he called true freedom—never license but disciplined, hard-won spiritual freedom. Wooed by nature to "come higher," Muir scrambled among the highest domes, ridges, and spurs, viewing from the summit of Mt. Dana a circled horizon of light. Indeed, Muir thought the Sierra might have been named better the Range of Light, not the Snowy Range. Now thought to be Muir's key utterance, which concludes this book and opens a career, he announced, "I have crossed the Range of Light. . . ."

Not to be forgotten is that Muir also had a scientist's eye. He carefully



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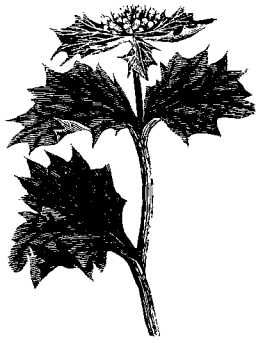
noted varieties of trees, birds, flowers, and insects, and paid particular attention to evidence of glacial action. It was this latter investigation that led to his controversial theory of the glacial origin of Yosemite, in opposition to the theory of a cataclysmic origin held by Professor Josiah D. Whitney of Harvard, the official State Geologist of California, whose *The Yosemite Guide-Book* was a standard work of the time. Muir's series of seven articles, appearing in the *Overland Monthly* (1874-75), established a scientific reputation that in later years he enhanced with further studies. But it was this first adventure into the Sierra wilderness that grounded his scientific observations in a private vision at once poetic, philosophic, and religious. Whatever his public role as scientist and conservationist later demanded of him, he had crossed the Range of Light and discovered an organicism connecting all things, an amplitude that was wealth, a sacredness everywhere, and, most important, a life of high and wakeful drama that was a gift of grace.

The next summer Muir gladly left his job in a small sawmill near Yosemite Falls to guide Professor Joseph LeConte and his University of California Excursion Party into the high Sierra. LeConte, whose extensive geological studies would later corroborate Muir's theory of living glaciers, was fascinated by this man of the mountains. He "gazes and gazes," LeConte wrote, "and cannot get his fill. . . . He is really not only an intelligent man, as I saw at once, but a man of strong and earnest nature, and thoughtful, closely observing, and original mind." Years later Muir was to guide many persons, including Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft, into this same region to encourage them to gaze too.

For the next half dozen years Muir made the California mountains his home. His friends, his father, and even his philosopher-hero Emerson, whom Muir met in the Yosemite in 1871, all advised him to stay down in the conventional world of respectability. However, Muir confessed to being "hopelessly and forever a mountaineer" with a two-fold work to do: pursue his scientific studies and nurture his deeper spirit. In time, destiny unfolded his career. Through his science he would entice others to gaze upon what he had found compelling, and his spirit would be an evangel to save America's natural West for future generations. He had heard his true calling as naturalist and conservationist.

* * *

His most satisfying triumph in conservation occurred when the bill to create Yosemite National Park became law on October 1, 1890. For years he had spoken out in lectures and newspaper articles against what he considered the State Commission's mismanagement of the region, but his two articles on Yosemite's natural "treasures" in *Century* magazine (August-September 1890) were easily his most influential pronouncements on the subject. After this success he helped to found the Sierra Club in 1892 and served as its president until his death. He spearheaded a successful fight for federal control to protect vast forest reserves. In 1906 he was heartened that Yosemite Valley finally had been incorporated into the National Park and, by this hard-fought measure, saved. His



ten articles, published first in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1901 and later the same year as a book, *Our National Parks,* again had influenced public sentiment which, in turn, led to the establishment of the Petrified Forest National Monument in 1906 and the Grand Canyon National Monument two years later. But Muir was not always successful. Despite his urgent conservationist message in *The Yosemite,* published in 1912, he lost a seven-year struggle to save the Hetch Hetchy Valley, a majestic region within Yosemite National Park. This was a bitter and ominous defeat, coming only one year before his death. He feared that Congressional action, which had granted San Francisco the site for a dam and reservoir within the Park, would invite other groups to encroach upon National Parks and reserves. Unfortunately, he did not live to see the auspicious creation of the National Park Bureau (Service) in 1916.

In his inmost heart Muir was a naturalist. This fact takes nothing away from his devotion to his family that included his wife, Louis Strentzel Muir, whom he married in 1880, and their two daughters, Wanda and Helen. Nor does it eclipse his loyalty to myriad friends, his public service, and the quotidian responsibilities connected with his ranch near Martinez in Contra Costa County. But as an investigator and philosopher (a true naturalist is both) Muir was at his best. He had no rival unless it was the great writer of nature essays, John Burroughs. As friends the two men were often called the two Johnnies—John o' the Mountains and John o' the Birds. Some people thought of them as the Wanderer and the Saunterer, Muir needing a continent to wander in and Burroughs finding inexhaustible interest in his native Catskills. Both naturalists were influenced by their Transcendentalist masters, Emerson and Thoreau, but Muir in particular went beyond them in his literal wanderings and beyond them also in capturing a sense of wildness.

Muir was one to climb a hundred-foot Douglas fir, the better to know the wildness of a windstorm. His trembling fingers searched out tiny rifts on Mt. Ritter's precipitous rock faces so that he could gain the summit. While surviving a frozen night on Mt. Shasta's crest, he yet could contemplate the "pure and tranquil radiance" of the stars above. His excitement in scaling Mt. Rainier exceeded the realization that he stood on its cratered top. In Alaska he braved ocean gales, leaped crevasses, canoed among treacherous icebergs, and mastered icy cliffs—all the while keeping a steady eye and a knowing spirit. Because all nature's actions interested him, storms held no fear. To fear storms was to display a lack of faith in what he called "Scriptures of Nature."

To Muir wildness was not a confrontation but a confirmation. To regard nature as an opponent was to alienate oneself from deep sources of identity, to have enmity toward one's surroundings, and to make war upon them. He recognized the psychological truth that we vandalize, pollute, plunder, and ravage what is separate from us; we protect and cherish what



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we belong to. Separated, we match our ego against the "other"—whether it be land, community, or another person—and in destroying the "other" we measure our triumph. The cost is broken relationships and an isolated heart that feeds on nothing but its own self-hatred. By contrast, when we join with what Emerson had called the "not me," we overcome our enmity and feel the same currents flowing through ourselves as through all things.

It needs to be said, however, that Muir was not guilty of the sentimentality that holds nature as a benign "friend." Such a relationship as this he knew to be fraudulent, its implicit narcissism resulting in the same alienation. Whether in its storms or its serenity, nature was too mysterious, too awesome, for Muir to regard as merely the litmus of his own precious sensitivity. For him nature's wildness, forever incalculable, confirmed a shaping divinity. That every person also has a wild side, quintessentially incalculable, testifies no less to the same divinity. For Muir the real epiphany occurs when a person experiences the corresponding order between his own deep wildness and that of nature.

Muir's travels took him to Alaska six times—his first two trips described in *Travels in Alaska* and his third described in *Cruise of the Corwin,* published posthumously in 1917 and 1918 respectively. For his last trip he joined John Burroughs and others on the Harriman Expedition, which he described in his 1911 biography, *Edward Henry Harriman,* and in his journals that were published posthumously as *John of the Mountains* in 1938. In 1893 he returned to Scotland to visit relatives and see his birthplace a final time; he also traveled on the Continent as far as Italy. Ten years later he made a world tour that included Russia, Egypt, China, India, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Japan, and Hawaii. A final trip in 1911 took him to South America and Africa. During these years his reputation as a naturalist earned him honorary degrees from Harvard, the University of Wisconsin, Yale, and the University of California in that sequence; membership in the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Washington Academy of Science; fellowship in the American Association for the Advancement of Science; presidency of both the Sierra Club and the American Alpine Club; and, most touching, his name as designation of the Muir Woods National Monument in Marin County. In later years a glacier in Alaska, a high mountain camp in Washington, and a trail in California, to mention but three such memorials, would bear his name.

Even a brief reassessment of Muir's life and writing must acknowledge a darker side. His conversion to Romanticism, which freed him from his father's harsh Calvinism, was never so conclusive as to prevent shadows from intermingling with his joyful wildness. These somber moods are especially evident in his Alaska writings in which he recoils, for example, from the butchery he sees among hunters killing walruses and seals for commercial profit and "sport." Furthermore, the government ship *Corwin* on which he sailed the Bering Sea and Arctic Ocean was, in fact, on a melancholy search for survivors of the *Jeannette* and two other lost whalers. These writings convey tones that are absent

from his Sierra jubilation. His father's death in 1885 and his mother's eleven years later, both preceded by his uncanny premonitions, engraved upon his consciousness a sense of mortality so powerful as to resist annulment through mystical wildness. His wife's death in 1905 and the passing of many friends during his own last years deepened the sense of loss. A few months before his death on Christmas Eve 1914 he was spiritually forlorn because of the barbarous guns sounding the beginning of World War I.

Nearing his end, perhaps he remembered the July afternoon of that unforgettable summer long years earlier in 1869 when he had made camp on the banks of Cascade Creek high along the Mono Trail. By the steep waterfalls Muir had observed the little water ouzel flying swiftly amid the spray and thunderous uproar but showing no intimidation from the dizzy precipices. Muir had heard in the thrush's song a message of "strength and peace and joy." When he came to write *The Mountains of California,* published in 1894, he devoted an entire chapter to the water ouzel. By this time the bird had possessed his imagination much as the Catskill eagle had captured Herman Melville's in *Moby-Dick.* Seeing how the eagle dived into the blackest gorges and yet soared out of them to become invisible in sunny skies, Melville recognized a kinship with the human spirit. Even though Muir never shared the depth of Melville's brooding sense of tragedy, something of the same symbolism imbues his water ouzel. In his fuller treatment of it Muir is struck by the fact that whereas most song birds are silent in water, the ouzel "sings on through all the seasons and every kind of storm." With an artist's instinct Muir continues to describe this bird: "Indeed no storm can be more violent than those of the waterfalls in the midst of which he delights to dwell. However dark and boisterous the weather, snowing, blowing, or cloudy, all the same he sings, and with never a note of sadness."

Muir's delight in the bird touched deepest levels when he affirmed, with elegiac overtones appropriate to his own life, that the water ouzel "*must* sing though the heavens fall." Knowing the guns indeed had begun to sound from abroad, he cherished the solitary singer all the more and remained confident that its song projected his own.

Muir's legacy includes not only the natural preservation of the Sierra but the best literary descriptions of it that anyone has left us. Furthermore, his sense of joyful wildness still provides an antidote, however tenuous, for the desperation we all feel but cannot adequately identify. We are also indebted for his going down into the inner peaks and valleys that call for a different kind of courage, one that tallies with the water ouzel's song. There within, John Muir fronted the essential facts of life and death, and showed Americans what it means to be a true frontiersman. Muir went to the boundaries of experience, his visionary eye beholding all things as linked, the unity embracing even the fall of heavens.

*—Harold P. Simonson*



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# Short Fiction:

## A Pair from Apple-wood

*P-town Stories, or The Meatrack*, by R.D. Skillings. Apple-wood Press (Box 2870, Cambridge, Mass. 02139). $4.50.

There are worse things to be than a writer of short stories (a politician, for example), and worse places to do it than Provincetown (Gary, Indiana, for example). The Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center is one of those places writers can go to write—like Yaddo or the MacDowell Colony—if they're lucky enough to get a grant, and can afford residence. At Provincetown, writers can socialize with other writers, meet famous visitors, or keep to themselves.

Like most New England seacoast towns that have anything at all to do with tourists (and Provincetown surely does) the place is two places: summer, and winter (season, and off-season). Summer brings the glitter crowd—tourists and weirdos. The bars are full and the beaches littered. Locals like fishermen are still there, of course, but their solid coloring fades against such neon. These latter types come into focus in winter, when again we recognize the basic colors of their prejudice, their boredom, their endurance, their ordinary lives.

R.D. Skillings has been at the Fine Arts Work Center since 1969, and he has seen it all. More importantly, he's heard it all. Reading this interesting book of very short fictions is like spending night after night in the Provincetown bars, or hanging out on the streets, or sitting on the meatrack—the row of park benches where locals sat around until the Selectmen took the benches away. In this book form follows content: the fictions are organized according to season.

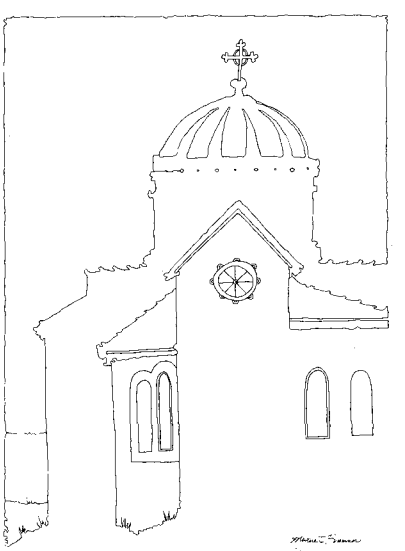
Skillings says, "Provincetown aspires to the condition of Venice. It'll never make it, except maybe in smells. Coming down Ciro's white-shelled alley on a hot murky night you get the luxuriant gardens, roses and honeysuckle, then a tinge of rotting garbage, then a whiff of skunk, and finally—back of that, subtler, pervasive, for a stiffening instant unrecognizably nostalgic—the cesspools. Then your breath blows it away and you go on to your pleasures, oblivious to the pitted finger of land lapped by the treacherous sea."

Like Venice (since Thomas Mann), Provincetown has a reputation. The reputation has to do with the number of gays who summer there, and some who live there year-round. Some people leave Boston on the ferry for the Cape to spend a day at Provincetown gawking at homosexuals, I've heard. Skillings is kinder than that. His people are *all* the people of Provinctown—golden surfer-boys, bored waitresses, proper old New Englanders. The flavor of the place, cumulative, after reading pages and pages of the voices of Provincetown telling compulsive, sordid, druggy, censorious, sad, lonely stories, makes you think of a carnival: those pretty tents and fancy painted ponies and noisy games like Ring Toss and Shooting Gallery, the debris spotting their turf, and always the tacky backs of things where the canvas is dirty and a bit torn, the Chihuahua sits on a trailer step wearing a sequined collar, where the trailer itself smells of yesterday's french fries. In places like this we see comely illusion, and seedy reality. But maybe neither are true. Maybe the truth happens where the people are telling their stories.

Here's one fiction, all of it:

NICE

My boyfriend? The last one? The one that looked like a criminal? Oh he left town, he had to get out, he couldn't take it any more, he's on vacation. I don't even want to think about him. He got to beating me up. One time he sat on my chest with his knees on my arms and hit me, it didn't matter what I said, Yes or No, he'd still hit me. He'd ask me these weird questions and then he'd hit me. I think he just liked hitting me, I don't even want to think about that. I had two black eyes. He was a real bastard, he was nice though.



Reading these stories is like sitting on the next bar stool and having just finished your second piña colada. You feel at times like taking a walk on the beach to get away from it. But in most of the fictions the voice is compelling, and there's something about human nature that makes us want to listen. All the way through. Besides, people usually have something important to say when the subject is themselves:

The story of the guy who got beat up over a parking ticket. Of the junky taken to the hospital, who doesn't trust 'fucking doctors.' The boy with the pin in his elbow. The kid who doesn't want to spend the rest of his life in North Cambridge. The story of Eddie who was sitting in the window of the Fo'c's'le—a local bar—with two floozies from B.U., when his wife Sugar went by with the babies in the carriage.

There are over 80 short fictions in this book, over 80 voices. The real protagonist is Provincetown itself. The voices of Provincetown are tough and lippy, heavily male in point of view, and very clear. And R.D. Skillings is a sort of funky Sherwood Anderson. A ventriloquist.

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*Crossing Over: A Vietnam Journal*, by Richard Currey. Apple-wood Press. $3.95.

If we want to be trendy, we might say (I've heard it said) that the Vietnam stories have been told already, in good books like *A Rumor of War*, *Dispatches*, and *Going After Cacciato*. That there's not anything new to say about Vietnam. Even the people who supported the War know it was ugly, sordid, and doomed. They might venture excuses ("I still think we should have turned North Vietnam into a parking lot") but mostly they'd rather not talk about it. Nobody wants to talk about it. Except some of the people who have been there.



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For a whole generation of Americans who went to Vietnam, and for those of us who worked in this country against our involvement in Southeast Asia, the War in Vietnam was an indelible, defining experience. It shapes the way we vote (or don't vote) now. It accounts for our cynicism. It is an unstopped social reservoir of pain. The statistics are being gathered on veterans: how many are now divorced, how many jobless, how many suffer permanent emotional damage, how many are genetically damaged by Agent Orange. The casualties—and the suicide rate—are high.

So if we don't want to be trendy, we know in our guts that there will be Vietnam stories for a long time, tracing the wound, reminding us. Our national neurosis is that we want to forget. But good sense tells us that health lies in remembering.

Richard Currey's book helps us to remember. This slim volume is the first person account of a medic in Vietnam. Its technique is pointillist: brief, strong images, images that are like statements, statements that tell a story of confusion and fear and violence and pain. This one, for example:

> Mamasan yelling huge consumptive sobs. Lieutenant holding his arm screaming. Mamasan rocking. Lieutenant shouts he's bleeding. Still holding his pistol. I begin dressing wounds. The widow's son: certain blindness. Lieutenant shouting to stop. You asshole he yells You never work on them. I look into the widow's face. She's staring into mine. Begin to cry. Thump of chopper blades in the long sky. Pulled aboard by the door-gunner. Then the hit. Then the dead.

The narrator tells memories of home, writes letters, takes us to the war, and finally is himself a casualty, and allowed to go home. The style is intense, compressed, and insistent.

Joseph Conrad said, "My task is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see." Currey's remarkable art is that in such a short volume he *has* made us hear and feel, and the effect is that we *see.* Vietnam is a complicated story that will speak to us in many voices, for a long time. Currey's is one true, resonant voice. If his book doesn't tidy things up, provide an answer or even a resolution, it may be because in the case of this war there is none.

*—Mary Peterson*


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# Brief Poetry Notices

*To a Blossoming Pear Tree*, by James Wright. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $7.95.

☆☆☆☆

Now that he is gone, these poems poignantly proclaim what made Wright so special: an empathy for even the lowliest or most outcast of earth's creatures and perfect pitch for rendering their sweetness and their dissonance.

---

*Mortal Acts Mortal Words*, by Galway Kinnell, Houghton Mifflin. $4.95.

☆☆☆☆

If not as fierce as his earlier work, these new poems present a Kinnell even more Whitmanesque in his stride across the page and his unblinking confrontation of death and temporality.

---

*(W)holes*, by Cynthia Macdonald. Knopf. $4.95.

☆☆☆☆

Wonder-and-Wasteland, Macdonald's circus of freaks and weirdies remains marvelously human. What a fine, undistilled imagination is here!

---

*Kingdom Come*, by Lawrence Kearney. Wesleyan. $8.00; $3.95 (paper).

☆☆☆

Unusually well-edited, this unselfish first book is especially charitable in extending its voice into the private lives of others without violating or pitying them.

---

*Halfway to Silence*, by May Sarton. Norton. $12.95; $4.95 (paper).

☆

The dust jacket tells us these poems are "in a mode that is perhaps not currently fashionable but one which has outlived all others in the history of poetry itself." We couldn't agree more: even in the Greek Anthology Bathos dressed up as Pathos can be found strutting about.

*Sliding down the Wind*, by Donald E. Azinn. The Swallow Press. $2.95.

☆

A grating ah-how-sensitive-am-I strain in the voice and an embarrassing boy scout enthusiasm for experience often send this book into sputterings of alliteration.

---

*Colophon of the Rover*, by Charles Edward Eaton. A.S. Barnes, $8.95.

☆

This seventh collection of the poet unveils poems of an unmistakable pomp and brio which in moments recall Stevens. Only in moments.

---

*White Center* and *The Right Madness on Skye*, by Richard Hugo. Norton. Each $12.95; $4.95 (paper).

☆☆☆☆

These two volumes both wear the undeniable badge of authority. The Hugo poem (which now has dozens of published imitators), half-epistle, half-confession, has an omnivorous appetite for experience in the world. These are books for the poet and the Man Who Hates Poetry. Give one to your brother-in-law.

---

*The Hard Essential Landscape*, by Van K. Brock. University of Central Florida (published by the University Presses of Florida). N.P.S.

☆☆☆

Hard-won poems hewn out of, and returning to, the earth. Brock's moral landscape, euphonious and meditative, reminds us that even in our time the poet is not a collector of images but an interpreter of experience.

*No Ordinary World*, by Mekeel McBride. Carnegie-Mellon. $8.95, $4.50 (paper).

☆☆☆

Lusciously pensive, these poems recall Marianne Moore in their sense of genuine wonder at confronting and constructing a world constantly becoming what it is.

---

*Reservations*, by James Richardson. Princeton. $2.95.

☆☆

Too aptly titled. Richardson, who can write as good a poem as anyone about landscape or weather, is frequently too self-effacing for his own good, and the peripheries of these poems blur one into the other.

---

*Coming to Terms*, by Josephine Miles. Illinois $8.95; $3.95 (paper).

☆☆

Poems born of real conviction and smelling of those West Coast gardens, natural and academic, which Miles knows so well are shoulder to shoulder with those which most poets leave in the notebook, perhaps forever.

---

*The Bus to Veracruz*, by Richard Shelton. Pittsburgh. $6.95; $3.95 (paper).

☆☆

A stunned, punch-drunk voice here makes nothing matter too much for this poet we have much admired in the past. Viz.: "I tell myself I don't/ believe in people/ but I know I believe in pain."

---

*In a Fugitive Season*, by Robert Dana. Ohio University. $7.95; $3.95 (paper).

☆☆☆☆

Dana's laconic line plays against white space to create a rhythm of anticipation and a rhythm of silence. Against these he develops social and political events, travel and a relationship between a man and woman. This artfully muted book opens the



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voice of lyric to larger intentions while singing intensely personal songs.

---

*Selected Longer Poems* by A.R. Ammons. Norton. $12.95; $4.95 (paper).

☆☆☆☆

Oracles and obfuscations programmed to delight and baffle. Some stanzas Ammons surely writes for himself alone, but there are other huge chunks of each excursus here which will come sailing across to even the crankiest reader.

---

*Waking to My Name*, by Robert Pack. Johns Hopkins. $15.95; $6.95 (paper).

☆☆☆

New and selected poems by one of our unexceptionable, steady sorts. A lot of these seem to work very hard to be acceptable; the best of them draw a greener virtue from their Vermont sources.

---

*Quicksand through the Hourglass*, by Dave Morice. Toothpaste Press (P.O. Box 546, West Branch, Iowa 52358). $4.50.

☆☆☆

Eccentric wit and a real commitment to the poem as poetry make this book succeed. One suspects that even if the work were dull, the craftsmanship of this fine press would make it seem rival to the Bard.

---

*The Strength of Fields*, by James Dickey, Doubleday. $6.

☆ ☆

Beware of poems in odd-format books, in eccentric patterns on the page, on tedious occasions, by famous names.

---

*The Sinking of the Titantic*, by Hans Magnus Enzenberger. Houghton Mifflin. $8.95; $4.95 (paper)

☆☆☆

If a British priest can make poetry from the *Deutschland*, then surely a German poet can build a quite compelling long poem from the *Titanic*. Translated into English by the author.

---

*Frog Praises Night: Poems with Commentary*, by F. Richard Thomas. Southern Illinois. $7.50.

☆

Who'd have thought to print with his poems the poet's asides and occasions? This publisher did—attempting, one supposes, to achieve the spontaneity of a live reading—and the result is awful. The so-so verse makes the notes doubly silly.

---

*Wonders*, by Karen Snow. Viking. $11.95.

☆☆☆☆

A remarkable first collection—colloquial, inventive, comic. Books like this run the risk of making ordinary folk think poetry is worth reading. The 1978 Walt Whitman Award winner.

---

*String*, by Dennis Schmitz. Ecco. $8.95.

☆☆

Domestic poems whose omission of capitals and conventional punctuation seems calculated to make the lines appear portentous.

---

*Any Body's Song*, by Joseph Langland. Doubleday. $8.95.

☆☆☆☆

An eloquent example of the virtues of tradition and poetic intelligence. Langland makes us wait far too long between volumes.


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# AUSPEX

## Acting, Producing, Directing, Learning

*All that's happened to me was not because I knew anything, but because I trusted my instincts.*

*Tony Bill*
*Actor-Producer-Director*

*Auspex*, the title of a poem by Robert Frost, which Tony Bill recited at the Mill Valley Film Festival. There, in August, they premiered his first directorial effort, "My Bodyguard." But first, an etymological investigation of that Latin word.

*AUSPEX*, from *Origens* by Eric Partridge:

> "Auspice L *auspex* is one who, for omens, examines (*specere, spicere*—a *spec-, spic-*, to see) the flights of birds (*auis*, ML *avis*, s *au-*, a bird)—for the elements, see AVIARY and SPY; *auspex* has derivatives *auspicium*, whence MF-F, hence E, *auspice*, an omen so obtained, hence any, usually a favourable, omen, and *auspicare* or *-ari*, to take an augury, with pp *auspicatus*, whence 'to *auspicate*.' Both the lit *auspicial (-ial)* and the fig *auspicious (-ious)* are of E formation."

*Fascinating!*—the words of poems—words!—opening aspects into different levels, to the speaker in the poem who talks back to the gods who have spurned him; he spurns them! There's nothing he couldn't be! There's power there, a persona that's round and real. And the title informs it all.

Built of metaphors (images) in levels is what poetry is. And its analogous form, film, can mine the same mountain—holding on to distinctions between kinds of films. There are those for the general audience which is mostly adolescent or pre-adolescent. (Did somebody think the fact there are fewer "R" films around is because of the moral force in the United States, not that adolescents and younger couldn't [are-not-supposed-to] get in to see them? With an "R" up front, supposedly you close out the majority of your audience—although my daughter tells me she's never *not* gotten to see an "R" if she wanted to). But, for *Art Films*, which demand real attention to deliver their experience, and have poor prospects in traditional distribution, there are the relatively few art-houses and the film festivals.

These days the festivals abound. An audience of film buffs? Motion picture museums, why not—? Film, the second youngest of the art forms, is rapidly becoming an archaic commercial form. The American Film Institute is scrambling around to find and preserve old films, to reprint from the nitrate base stock which not only deteriorates but is so volatile that it becomes explosive. Nitrate was the original stock used until the acetate base was introduced after World War II, and, through the '50s, became standard. So be it for black and white; now we find out that the color in film prints is deteriorating too, fading. Even in the five years since "Jaws" was made there have been radical changes in the color tones; the blue is going out of the water, while the spurting blood gets more red! The color in numerous films produced in the '50s and '60s—"Around the World in 80 Days," for instance—is irreparably damaged—gone.

Technicolor—which was the original color process in the United States and became standard until supplanted by the cheaper Eastmancolor stock in the 1950s—is a three strip process. One primary color registered on each strip in a special camera, each processed separately, they are married in the final print for projection For various reasons Technicolor prints and originals are not subject to the same deterioration as the Eastmancolor which is one strip. But Eastmancolor is cheaper, and easier (both of which are only, sometimes, guarantees of *the business* embracing them). Only, now, the color is going out of the prints.

Kodak has never claimed that the prints won't fade. After all they are subject to rough trade. But the negatives—*the original*—are also deteriorating. New with-the-original-color prints can't be struck, and *this* Kodak has not fully admitted. Old color films could be reprinted now on separation negatives, which would help. Cold storage vaults could be built, which would help too. But a combination of corporate waffling and industry penny pinching is what's happening now. Except that, under the aegis of Martin Scorsese (and many many other industry big-timers), there is a movement to bring heavy pressure to bear on the guilty parties, the studios and Kodak both, to do something to preserve the heritage of color films—in *color!*

All this aside—sad as it may be—what's making film an anachronism is: commercial/public television, VTR (video tape recording), the cable systems, and—on the immediate horizon—digital recording (the application of the binary number codes from computers to the registration of both sound and image). What's happening is that both the mechanical (now electronic) expression of the sound/image on the screen, and the aesthetic/social experience of how it's watched, is changing. It's a microcosm of the *radical change* from the old world of physical science (film is a chemical process) to the electronic and mathematical future—a part of what Alvin Toffler calls *The Third Wave*.

Tony Bill is only one of many who think that access to cable tv viewing may replace motion picture theatres for all but the most spectacular or "special event" films. And "television has bred a generation of viewers that don't really think about what they're watching," he said "—the



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automated viewer. I noticed that when I went across the country interviewing kids for my movie." He would ask if they watched tv, and they would say, "Yeah, sure. . ." But when he asked *what* they watched—their favorite shows—or series, they couldn't tell him. "But they tell me they watch a lot of tv. The experience is *watching tv,* not what they're watching. I think it's this desensitized sensibility they bring into the movie theatre."

He also talked of habits carried over from home viewing—getting up, going to get a beer, talking back to the screen—all of which he sees now in the theatres. Then, in the triplexes and fourplexes, the sound from one house bleeds through the walls, and nobody notices. They don't notice whether the picture is in focus, or even if the wrong reel gets put up. "They're a sloppy audience, not a demanding one. They laugh at stuff that's not funny."

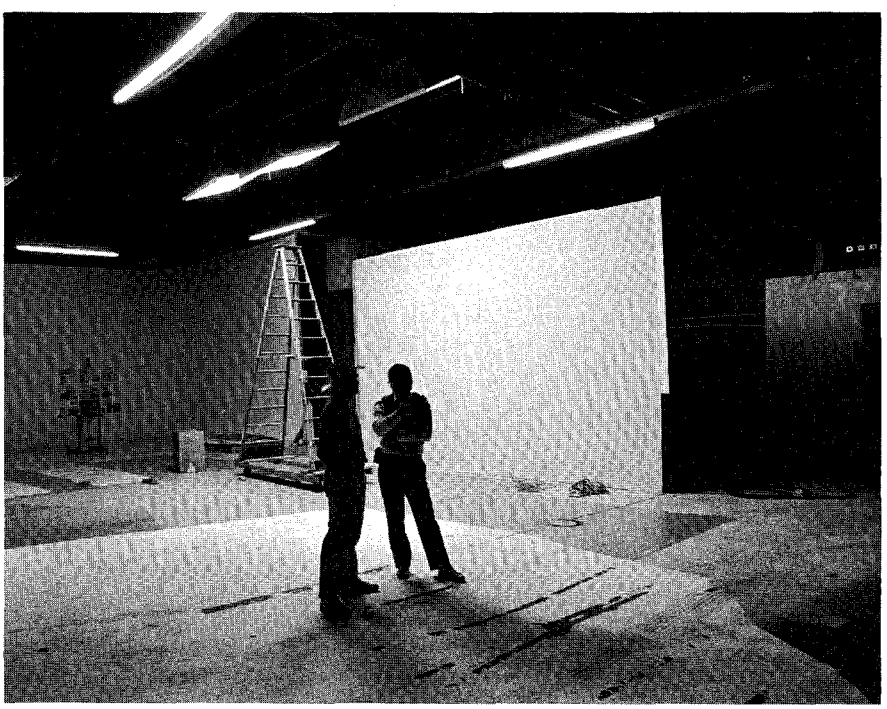
That's too bad too, because one special aesthetic of the form of film is its experience in a dark theatre, shared with other spectators, the concentration on a large screen, and super figures (archetypes, most of the old stars were) moving in front of our eyes. Watching a real-movie movie on a video screen, whatever its size, it's like a subway station is not the best place to read a good book. So, film festivals; in the future, *they* will give access to film in its real form.

Previous to the opening of this year's San Francisco International Film Festival, Albert Johnson, one of the four co-directors who have taken over from the old regime this year, quoted about what was up-coming, October 5th in the S.F. *Examiner* Sunday "Datebook:" "I think there's something for everybody in the program, something for everyone to discover. We're trying to create a festival that is a kind of adventure. It has to be fun, too, because our goal is to make it not only a tribute to the art, but an exciting event for anyone who enjoys movies."

"It's a celebration of the Art of Film," says Mark Fishkin, executive director, of the Mill Valley Film Festival. With gross tix at $15,000, grants of $30,000, and the balance between that and a $92,000 gross budget of "in kind" donations, in its third year this festival broke even. The audience increased 30%—which Fishkin ascribes to having better facilities, including the use of the funky-attractive Mill Valley Outdoor Art Club (circa 1904) for the obligatory opening bash. All this preceded the premiere of Tony Bill's "My Bodyguard," screened across Throckmorton Avenue in the Sequoia Theatre.

Recently made into a *duplex* by the installation of a wall down the center of one bigger house and with a smaller screen on either side, it's a little strange, since the old seats were angled on the outer edge to face a common center, and now you sit slightly slaunchwise to see a screen directly in front of you.

The people outside on opening night were the beautiful people of Mill Valley—the same kind, with local variations, that go to festival opening nights everywhere, I suppose; they *are* social events. The first nighters had been at the party across the street where they were served Chateau St. Jean wine, catered *hors d'oeuvres,* Crystal Geyser Water, and listened to the Baroque Ensemble representing the Mill Valley Chamber Music Society. There had been a video news crew from some San Francisco station, interviewing Tony Bill. The food was good, and after it, just across the street, sitting slightly slaunchwise, I hear the guy in the seat behind me talking to the beautiful girl with him . . . about his script . . . some award . . . but he doesn't know about this producer . . . his *sen-*





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*sibilities*, you know . . . He speaks about himself sadly, as the artist—not fulfilled.

## 2. Auspex

Once in a California Sierra
I was swooped down upon when I was small
And measured, but not taken after all
By a great eagle bird in all its terror.

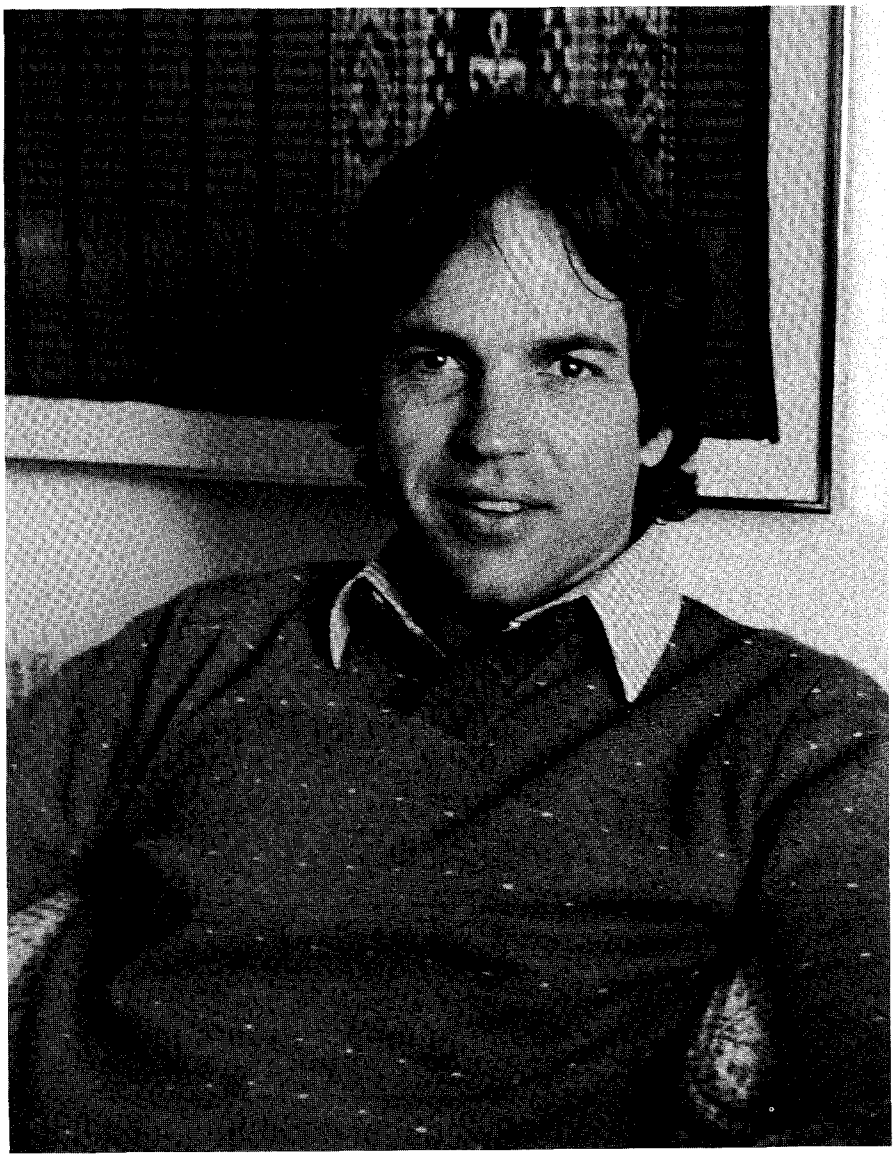
Such auspices are very hard to read.
My parents when I ran to them averred
I was rejected by the royal bird
As one who would not make a Ganymede.

Not find a barkeep unto Jove in me?
I have remained resentful to this day
When any but myself presumed to say
That there was anything I couldn't be.

Robert Frost
*In The Clearing* (1962)

"That's the cocky attitude that got me into the movie business," Tony Bill said, having quoted Frost's poem in introduction to what he described as his favorite film up to "Bodyguard" which he had just directed. It was the afternoon after the premiere, a festival retrospective tribute to him, and "Hearts of the West" was the film to be screened; Bill produced it and the theme has somewhat the same sort of cocky attitude. In 1975 "Hearts" was the premier attraction at the San Francisco International Film Festival, but sank from sight fairly rapidly. It's too bad because it's a good film set back in the '30s—the Halcyon Era—about a young man who wants to be a writer, ends up in Hollywood as a stunt man for a schlocky western company, and writes the successful script. Given its accurate rendition of the industry the movie is both pointed commentary and very funny about the crazy *business*.

Over the years I have talked to Tony Bill in various offices in Hollywood, and I have written considerably, informed by his point of view to the industry. Somewhat of maverick himself (he has his office in Venice, some distance from the heart of the business in Hollywood, because, he told me once, he likes that *distance*), successful in his other careers of acting and producing, thoughtful, articulate and seemingly quite insightful. I am always glad to pick his brain. This time we met in a top floor suite of a hotel in San Francisco, its windows looking out over the tall buildings, the Transamerica Tower, to the bay, Alcatraz and the hills of Marin beyond.



I remember that he was up to direct a picture after the phenomenal success of "The Sting" which he produced (and which was the subject of the first piece on film I published in NAR in 1974), but it wasn't until 1979 that he finally did it. "My Bodyguard" is primarily a film about real adolescent boys in real Chicago, and incidentally about the whacky family of one of them. The father (Martin Mull) manages a big hotel and tries to keep his mother, the boy's grandmother (Ruth Gordon), from running amok; this part of the plot as rickety to me as the part about the boys was not.

The negative cost of the picture was in the neighborhood of 4 million, which is less than a lot of movies these days. In a recent piece in *Variety*, reporting the 15th annual convention of the National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO), Frank Rosenfelt, chair and executive officer of MGM Films, stated that the break-even point of the average film today is 16 million, that a picture needs to gross 40 million to get that investment back. The average production cost these days, he said, is 10 million, up 15% from 1979, and 65% from 1978. Also, the average marketing cost of a film is 6 million, which is what Tony Bill said it was going to cost to market "My Bodyguard." What this means is that his picture is an 11 million dollar movie that has to gross. . . . etc., etc. . . .

The big problem is distribution, Tony Bill says, and the collection of the money once it's paid in at the box-office. "Everything I know about it, which is very little, but every opinion that I have heard is that not to go through a major is basically assuring yourself of financial lack of compensation." If it costs once again as much (and often more) to distribute the film for the big time, the national break, you do that through a



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major, and that's why it costs that much. But if you don't do that, if you can't get one interested—Catch 22—then the small distributor doesn't have the clout to get the picture exhibited well, get the hot advertising, or *collect* the money from the exhibitors. It's a common industry gripe that exhibitors are crooks who rip off the receipts before they send them, along with doctored reports, to the distributors (from whom the filmmakers get theirs!).

If low-budget big time is about 4 million—what "Bodyguard" cost—what is the absolute minimum for the small timers? (I remember when it was $150,000). Half a million, Tony Bill thought, "and even that might be out of date now—it might be seven hundred thousand." There are a few of those movies around (and every once in a while one hits, the flacks get on the case, and the [mostly] myth of sudden fame and riches in Hollywood continues) but, "it's tough, real tough. First of all no major can invest in that kind of movie because it's (probably) non-union." He went on talking about the fact that, no matter what you say, the games of musical chairs in the industry executive suites, their ball-lessness, those executives at the majors do have considered judgments from their experience about the success or failure potential of a project, but they are cut out of it. That leaves the potential investors as people outside the industry who *don't* know—which is often where the chaos starts.

And it's the crazy times—the constant escalation of costs. If distribution is up 20% a year, it was twenty years ago you could get a top cameraman for $2500 a week. "Now," Tony says, "you won't believe ten thousand a week—and points—*and* paid ads!"

* * *

Sitting then on an 11 million dollar nut, his picture that *he* directed, Tony Bill had this to say about the experience of its creation:

> *You spend as much time and care as you can and go to the final dub. And then you play the picture back and hear all the wonderful sounds, all the things you wanted to hear—it's great, but the fact is that's the last time you'll ever hear it like that. At that point it's on Mag track—it hasn't gone to optical yet; and second, it's the best sound system that money can buy and maintain. When it goes to optical you notice it doesn't sound the same; and then you see it in your regular theatre and it's just inescapably inferior. You spend all that time on it, and two days after the picture opens the print is scratched from handling in the theatre. . .*

And the emotion of seeing it:

> *It's sort of magical because you tend to forget after all the time that you spend both shooting and editing, scoring and dubbing, that all of this effort is going to have a perceptible effect on the audience—that there's going to be highs . . . laughs . . . there's going to be applause—but I feel like I can never trust the film completely. You know, in my imagination, somehow it's going to go on the screen in front of some group of people and nobody's going to laugh and nobody's going to applaud and nobody's going to like it. Instead, of course, the experience of it is that they always laugh and they always applaud and they always love it. But because it's a different audience every night, and their reaction different, you forget that it's the same film. . .*

* * *

He said his theory of movie making is based on the hope that people—the audience—want to see something that's real. There's a difference between movie life (depicted in slick films and most television) and real life. He thinks "Kramer vs. Kramer" dealt with real life, as did "Breaking Away." " 'Bodyguard' deals with real life, and I hope there's room for those kinds of movies—as opposed to the kinds of movies that deal with movie life."

Sure, there's room for those kinds of movies, he says, but he's less sanguine about the fact that the conventional form of viewing in the near future is certain to be a television screen. "I can't quite believe that humankind will not need to go out for

# LETTERS

To the Editor:

Lawrence Sturhahn, in the September NAR "Film" column, complains that George Lucas' *Star Wars* and *Empire Strikes Back* are not "mythic." Instead, they are works of "romance," meaning works ". . . more concerned with action than with character. . . . Dramatic realism these pictures certainly are not."

Myths, Sturhahn goes on, contain characters we can relate to one-to-one, and myths work "because the humans in them are very human indeed. . . ."

Mr. Sturhahn must know myths other than those with which I'm familiar. The characters in myths I know wield thunderbolts, spring fully armored out of brains, devour their children out of fear of being dethroned by them, and engage in all manner of other decidedly non-human feats. Dramatic realism these myths certainly are not.

Moreover, if by "human" Mr. Sturhahn simply means "mortal," his point is even further off the mark, for the humans (i.e., mortals) in myths are the least interesting characters of all. They exist mostly as bewildered foils for the actions of the gods, unless they are demigods or heroes, busy founding civilizations and destroying monsters. In these cases, action, not character, reigns, and dramatic realism these heroes' stories certainly are not.

Granted one might fault Lucas' space operas on many points, not the least of which is wooden dialogue and sophomoric love-play. But to fault them because they are all action and no character denies their very premise; large heroes—gods included—require large actions. They seldom deliberate, hesitate, or cogitate. Instead, they act, swiftly and often inexplicably.

Darth Vader and company explode an entire planet for revenge; Zeus would have understood, though he may have felt threatened by the upstart mortal in black and sent a blast of thunderbolts to humble him. Luke and Hans Solo heroically battle for their lives, their honor, and their race; Ulysses would have cheered, though he probably would have preferred more hand-to-hand combat. Dramatic realism? Certainly not.

Myth? Yes.

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**(signature)** **Robley Wilson, Jr., Editor**

some sort of formal entertainment, but if it's in the home, then that's the way it will have to be. But I keep thinking people will always want to go into a big dark room and sit together and laugh or cry—or whatever. God knows, 'Kramer' helped to bolster my belief in that.

"The people who decide what movies are going to be made are basically a handful of stars and star directors. The executives at the studios don't really make movies—they go along with the money." He went on to relate how he was offered the direction of a film that had been kicking around a long time—seven, eight years. The script, he thought, was bad, "very derivative and very undistinguished," but a hot young woman wanted to star in it—and Tony thought she was terrific. He was tempted, but he kept reading the script and saying, "God, it's not a great script, but it's a great actress, and then I realized something, which was—a seventeen year old is making the decision whether this movie should be made. The producer who owns the property is not deciding! The major studio financing it is not deciding! A seventeen year old is deciding. I decided not to do it."

It was different in the old days—when the majors, with their omniscient studio bosses, Adolph Zukor at Paramount, Samuel Goldwyn and the Warner brothers, Louis B. Mayer, and Harry Cohn at Columbia, decided and told the stars and hired the directors and made the movies. In the '30s a lot of good films were made in America. Tony Bill thinks it was a better system.

* * *

If, in '73, after "The Sting," he was up for directing something (he remembers it might have been "Taxi Driver"), he didn't, but that's six odd years— What took you so long? I asked him. "After all, you're obviously professional, Tony, and you know the business. You were/are a successful actor, a successful producer . . . so why didn't the industry give you a job?"

"Well, I didn't really push for it, didn't feel like I had the right to ask for millions of dollars from somebody to spend as I see fit—the way a director is basically behaving. . . . Until I read 'My Bodyguard' I didn't really fall enough in love with a script—enough to know that I could sustain myself through the shooting . . . that I could handle the job. Other people had more confidence in me than I had in myself; it took me a long time.

"I didn't want to be the mistake a lot of first-time directors are. I wanted to make as sure as I could make—which is, of course, not very sure at all. I didn't want to humiliate myself—to close the door to future directing by fucking up the first time. *Because,* you see, I'm all too aware of the statistics—that almost everybody's first film is a failure commercially—and few first films are aesthetic successes.

"And it's getting to be a more and more rarified atmosphere for filmmaking—you know there aren't hundreds of movies produced each year. Well, I felt I only had one chance and if I stumbled and fell . . . I needed to be comfortable going into it, and it just took me that long to feel comfortable."

Part of that was to apprentice a little bit; "Bodyguard" is not really his first directorial credit. It is "The Ransom of Red Chief," an adaptation of the O. Henry short story, commissioned by Learning Corporation of America, 16mm Educational, shot in 10 days. A period picture, with an antique car, a kid, and a temperamental actor—all such is automatically bad news! They had no money so they had an amateur crew who struggled with night work; one whole day of day-for-night didn't come out because of the camera failure. That's one way of getting your feet wet. "Yeah—real wet!" Tony said.

And "Bodyguard" was no dish of cream. "It was tough," Tony said. First he was under no illusions—this was a movie with first-time actors in the principal roles; the script had been turned down by a lot of people in Hollywood; it was first time for the writer, and the cameraman was an unknown; they were shooting locations in Chicago. Forty-eight days was the schedule, and there was no track record for the genre—"Breaking Away" had yet to be released.

"I felt a lot of panic," Tony said, "the whole time we were shooting—not knowing what the finished picture was going to be."

"Were you able to hide that?" I ask.

"Yeah, I was really good—my acting experience came into play. . ." (He laughs).

*AUSPEX* —*Lawrence Sturhahn*



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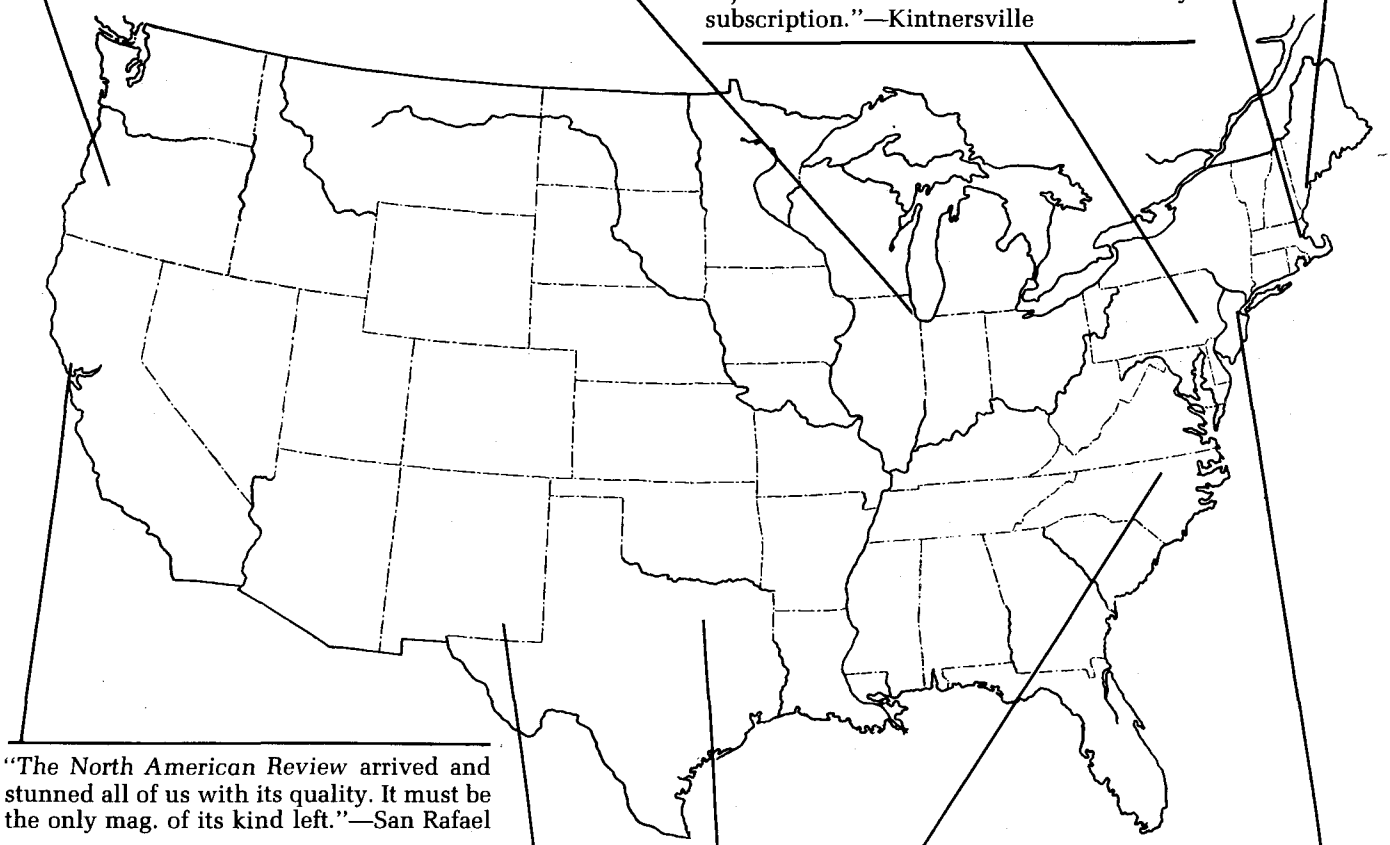

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